

REPORT OF PRE ROUNDTABLE ACTIVITIES

Manifesto contextualisation

The Marathmoli team engaged with the draft Manifesto conceived by the STEPS Centre. It also deliberated on 'Knowledge Swaraj', a Manifesto on Science and Technology Policy developed by the Knowledge in Civil Society team.

In developing a Manifesto that represented the realities of Indian women, Marathmoli focussed on the 3Ds concept of the STEPS Manifesto concepts, and drew on the concept of cognitive justice presented in the 'Knowledge Swaraj' document but thought it necessary to frame these in the feminist context.

Giving a historical overview of the growth of modern science and technology in Europe, Marathmoli's Manifesto located the devaluation of experiential knowledge, especially of women and other marginalised communities, and the violence of science and technology innovation in the systemic processes of the ideology of caste, colonialisation, patriarchy and market based globalisation.

In framing the Manifesto around the the 3D concept in science and technology innovation promoted by the STEPS Centre, Marathmoli underlined some key concepts. The 'situatedness' of women's knowledge, science and technology innovation as everyday practice of women, exclusion of women from benefits of S&T innovation at the same time paying the cost of associated risks, the myths of rationality, objectivity and value neutrality of science and technology innovation were highlighted. The document underlined the criticality of an enabling policy environment that was focussed on reversing the marginalisation, exclusion and abuse of women by science and technology innovation. It expressed confidence that an institutionalisation of experiential knowledge and expertise, rooted in the values of coexistence and sustainability, would drive a change in the directionality of contemporary science and technology policy.

Capacity Building Workshops

Participating Organisations

Lokpanchayat (People's Government) <http://lokpanchayat.org/>

Lokpanchayat believes that development with justice and conservation of the environment is the foundation of sustainable development. It supports marginal farmers in improving their agriculture by adopting organic farming, micro-planning, and appropriate technologies. It has evolved the institution of 'Krishak panchayat' for effective transfer of knowledge within the communities.

Lokpanchayat has successfully built a farm women's cooperative society that produces and markets agro-based products. It has transactions in millions of rupees and involves over a thousand women. Lokpanchayat has a network of women communicators providing legal aid and counselling to women in trouble and destitution.

Yuva Mitra (Friends of Youth) <http://yuvamitra.org/>

Yuva Mitra is a voluntary organisation engaged in community development around the issues of gender equity, child rights, right to education, biodiversity conservation and sustainability of agriculture. The Yuva Mitra team works intensively with women, children and farmers. Yuva Mitra's work over the last nine years has played an important

role in evolving methodologies to seek community participation and to build creativity in each activity. Yuva Mitra is organizing rural communities around the issues of Natural Resource Management, Education, Women's role in governance and developmental issues in general. Today Yuva Mitra is working intensively with women, small farmers, youth and children from 36 remote villages located in Sinnar block of Nasik district, Maharashtra.

Marathmoli conducted a workshop with 15 activists representing the two grassroots organisations in Sangamner district, Maharashtra State. A document on demystifying science and technology in the local language was circulated to the organisations before the workshop. The Manifesto was presented in the local language, Marathi, and the discussions are summarised below:

Scientific thought and culture in Indian society

- Relations of power based on diverse hierarchical social structures prescribe unquestioning obedience
- This has inhibited critical analytical thought, especially in the period after the rise of Brahmanism. Thus the stagnation of science and technological innovation in India is due to the knowledge politics of a patriarchal caste system

Adoption of science and technology innovation

- Historically development activists are anti technology/ mechanisation due to the risk of job loss and resistance to change
- Lack of competitiveness and consequently fewer opportunities for rural youth due to lack of access to technology innovation in education

Example

Yuva Mitra started a Computer Literacy Program for school children to counter this. Two computers were installed in five villages. This not only built children's skills but enhanced confidence of girls. Sunil Pote, President Yuva Morcha, observed, 'This experience proves that access is critical to technology adoption. Besides, technology access definitely plays a critical role in empowering girls and women.'

Exclusion of women from science and technology access

- Technological innovation targets drudgery in household for urban women but the strain on rural women's labour in performing reproductive tasks, household and wage labour is neglected
- Gender discrimination in family denying girls and women access to technology
- Social mores forbid women from using technological innovation like bicycles for transportation, so women are forced to walk long distances and girls have to drop out of schools. Restricted mobility limits opportunities for women and makes them more dependent on male family members and more susceptible to violence and abuse
- Irrigation has increased rural women's labour but technological innovation is targeted at men's labour

Example

Sarang Pande, Director, Lok Panchayat said a study conducted by them had observed certain negative consequences of irrigation for them. 'Irrigation led to increased agricultural tasks, increased livestock lengthened their days and traditional

men's labour activities were also transferred to women. This increased work burden has impacted their health status negatively.'

Science and technology in everyday life of women

- Learn from responding to needs of survival. Practice is adopted through processes of experimentation and analysis in context of needs
- Experiential knowledge - science & technological innovation needs enabling environment and relevant resources to reach scale and be valued

Field meetings

Lok Panchayat

Seven meetings were conducted with SHGs across different classes in villages Kurkundi, Pokhari Baleswar, Sangamner Khurd, Ghulewadi and Nimaj

Discussion

Lok Panchayat focussed on the role of technological innovation in reducing women's labour. They developed a questionnaire and organised discussions around the schedule.

Questionnaire

1. Day to day work and its schedule
2. Severity of labour and its impact on women's health and well being
3. Demand for science and technology innovation to reduce their labour and its severity
4. Scientific and technological applications used in everyday life
5. Expectation of benefits of use of science and technology applications
6. Planning of use of time saved due to science and technology innovation application

Highlights of findings

- i. Average 18 hour work day for women involved in agriculture, either as family or wage labour, leaves them no time to tend to self or spend time with children. Women from BPL (below poverty line) families work even longer hours. Self employed women and service sector women are able to spare some time for own leisure and attending to children's studies.
- ii. Heavy load carrying and long distance travel for fuel, fodder and water collection, weeding, manual harvesting, milking dairy animals, household tasks like washing clothes and utensils, sweeping and wiping floor, and making rotis/ chapattis were identified as the most strenuous tasks.
- iii. Expected and demanded technological innovation to reduce this labour
- iv. Women in tribal areas, from BPL families and so called lower caste communities do not have the knowledge of existing technological innovations, lack skills to use the same if they were to have access and most importantly the existing technology innovation applications do not respond to their needs. Self employed women and service sector women have the knowledge and need for use of these technology innovation applications but are restrained by patriarchal social mores and lack of decision making authority from benefiting from them.
- v. Women expect significant time and labour saving benefits from responsive technology innovation applications

- vi. 70% of the activities identified by women as possible in the time saved due to technology innovation application are focussed on their own selves. For example, reading, pursuing knowledge building and technical skill building like computers, pursuing hobbies, increased participation in SHGs, participation in public life, taking rest and attending to their health.

Discussions

Women also underscored that the practice of early marriage results in girls being forced to drop out of school, denying them opportunities to gain knowledge. They highlighted that women are perceived only as labour, procreators of children and workers for household and agricultural drudgery. Their contribution is not acknowledged or appreciated, just taken for granted. Further, they lack decision making power in all areas and are denied permission to access and use any form of technology, in the house, on the farm or in public space, for example using bicycles for travelling. Even in the rare instances that women have started using technology, their knowledge and expertise is not valued and they are not consulted when decisions are made regarding purchase of newer applications.

In the context of reproductive health, women drew attention to the fact that government policy is directed at controlling women's fertility to reduce population but no innovations are developed to target men. Thus both the male members and the government take all decisions for women.

Yuva Mitra

Meetings were conducted with community women in each of the four villages, namely Vadgaon, Adwadi, Bhatwadi and Jamgaon.

Discussions

Women raised the issue of drudgery and load of labour, especially in tasks like weeding, planting, digging and harvesting the onion crop. They protested this neglect of women's technology needs and demanded technological innovation that would reduce this burden.

They also discussed the devaluation of women's experiential knowledge and expertise and the use of science and technological innovation, even by their own selves. They shared the silencing of women's voices and denial of recognition of their knowledge were they to present the same. The groups discussed the scientific principles of traditional technologies used in household labour, e.g. pestle and grinding stone, matchsticks. This discussion led them to be aware of their own scientific knowledge. Women reiterated that exclusion and marginalisation of women from science and technology itself was the root cause of contemporary unsustainable and male biased science and technology innovation.

Capacity Building Workshop

A capacity building workshop was conducted on 11th March 2010 in Chiplun in partnership with Shramik Sahayog. 15 participants, including activists and Self Help Group (SHG) members participated in the workshop.

Science, Technology and Health

- Emphasis on women as target of family planning policy
- Clinical trials and women's health
- Institutionalisation of patriarchal processes

Constitutional Rights, Policy and implementation

- Instrumentalisation of rights enshrined in Constitution due to top down policy making and ineffective implementation
- Women treated not as humans but devalued as objects to be used to achieve patriarchal goals

Gender and Security

- Violence in public space impacts mobility of women and restricts educational opportunities
- Women face violence in family if they take leadership in public space
- Importance of infrastructure in public space, lighting, transport etc

Gender and Environment

- Women from poor communities have greater dependence on natural resources and have knowledge of the uses of the same
- Women do not own land and have no power to oppose the husband when the latter decides to sell the land and to get access to the money received on the sale
- Government policy favouring industries to take over local community land/ forests and control natural resources

Example

Vrushali Salvi, a health activist, from the organisation Sanvad shared about their work. Sanvad harnesses women's knowledge of natural resources especially in the domain of health to prepare herbal medicines that are then marketed across the state

Rajan Indulkar, Program Director Shramik Sahyog expressed that the Katkari community with whom they worked had a huge store of indigenous knowledge. But neither this tribal community nor the larger society valued this knowledge held by the former and if this was not documented soon it would be lost to the coming generations.

Women, Work and Health

7. Impact of the back breaking gendered agricultural tasks take a toll on women's health
8. Need to reduce women's drudgery through mechanisation, use of science and technology

Field Meetings

4 meetings were conducted with SHGs in 4 different villages, namely Veheley, Kalkavney, Tivre and Alore in Chiplun Taluka (Block).

Issues discussed

Science, Technology and Women's Health

In this region infertile women have a very low status and are often deserted by their husbands if they fail to bear a child within 3-4 years of marriage. The issue is perceived from the cultural lens and not the scientific one. Patriarchal ideology blames the women and finds her at fault for 'failing' in her duty to bear a child without addressing this issue as a medical one in which the root cause could be attributed to the medical condition of either the husband or the wife.

Medical research has amply demonstrated that it is indeed possible for women to reverse infertility and bear healthy children, improve their health and that of the children they bear by increasing the spacing between two births. But patriarchal ideology does not permit women this control over their reproductive health and continues to objectify them as means towards an end.

Older women have traditionally been the custodians of traditional healing knowledge and this knowledge was being transferred to the next generation through everyday practice. But advance in science had led to the professionalisation of health care and as this traditional knowledge was not documented it was being lost to the future generations.

Prior to technological advancement in processing agricultural produce, grains like rice were processed at home. Its by products like rice husk were consumed in daily diets and helped in increasing nutrition. Advance in agricultural science has led to a change in traditional cropping patterns, from vitamin rich coarse cereals to cash crops and once again this has impacted the nutritional health of the community.

Traditionally, agricultural work was done primarily by draught power and the dung was used as fertilizer. This organic way of farming sustained soil quality and produced a tasty and nutritious crop. But advance in agricultural science introduced chemical fertilizers to the farmer and mechanisation has replaced draught animals. This has poor soil quality, diminishing yields and has turned farming into a unsustainable economic activity in the region. Male members are turning away from farming and migrating or moving to petty jobs. But women continue to labour on family farms and have to put in extra labour in the absence of male family members. This takes a heavy toll on their health.

Science, Technology and Women's work

Women and girls had advanced in all spheres, they were nurses, doctors, railway engine drivers, aircraft pilots, teachers and also worked in the Information Communication Technology (ICT) domain. Many of these women had rural roots but had been able to access opportunities. Currently as ICT training opportunities exist only in the town very few women and girls from rural areas could benefit as their work burden does not allow

them much free time. If ICT training opportunities were available in villages women expressed willingness not only to send their daughters for the training, but also their daughter-in-law. ICTs helped in accessing greater information and gaining more knowledge and increased opportunities for development.

Once again, women underlined the drudgery and hardships of satisfying women's reproductive responsibilities. The impending drought in the summer months led to severe water crises, and women and young girls spend a majority part of the day collecting water. They shared that women's labour has increased and their days have become longer due to the frequent loadshedding in electricity supply. Knowledge of science and technology innovations in rainwater harvesting and storage of water would reduce their workload and free their time for other productive activities. Diversification of energy generation and access to alternative and renewable energy products would give them access to low cost, sustainable energy sources and reduce their dependence on fuelwood. This would save their labour, time and have a positive impact on their health.