

ActionAid International

**Taking Stock II – A review of gender and  
women’s rights  
in ActionAid International  
2004**

**by  
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# INTRODUCTION

## Some Introductory Reflections and Explanations

Travelling has been a part of my working life for 30 years. My family has had to live with it. When my daughter was about six years old I took her with me for a workshop/training. Our work started at eight in the morning and never finished before 10-11 at night. After three days my daughter asked me, “Amma when will your work start”? She obviously did not think what we did from morning till night was quite work. She must have thought how can work be being with friends, sitting comfortably and informally in an inspiring place, just talking (discussions) and bursting into laughter or tears, songs or/and dance; watching videos etc.

Taking Stock 2 (TS2) was on the one hand like a roller coaster ride across continents. Very demanding, very tiring for the body and the mind. But on the other hand it did not feel like work or a burden. It felt more like pleasure, more like honour and also learning because we were with committed people fighting poverty by building and/or supporting communities, creating partnerships and networks, doing action research, advocating for pro-people policies etc. It was inspiring to be with people of all classes, castes, races, nationalities, learning, innovating, talking of values in a world where most people are concerned just with profit, power or their own survival.

I am happy and grateful for this opportunity. I would of course have enjoyed this experience much more if I did not have to produce pearls of wisdom and advice (this report) at the end of it. However, I realize, most mortals have to sing for their supper. So here is my song...and I know not what it's like! I do not know whether the raga, the pitch, the style are okay. But one thing I wish to say with all honesty, I have seldom worked so hard as during TS2. And the credit for this goes also to ActionAid International (AAI), whose work and staff were special and inspiring.

At the very outset I wish to state I accepted to be part of the TS2 team because I respected AAI's work, its staff I have had the opportunity to meet and know and also the way it has been evolving its vision, perspective and approaches to development work.

The team were and are acutely aware of all the shortcomings of such reviews and particularly of this review. At best, such reviews can show how much an organization is genuinely trying to do, what it has set out to do. According to some philosophies only our intentions and actions are in our control, not the results. Anyway, in the poverty or development arena organizations like AAI are but one of the actors, one of the forces at play and also not the biggest of forces. The other forces affecting development are national and international policies, market forces, huge corporations etc. Many, if not most, of these forces are creating poverty, destroying people's livelihoods, and communities, robbing people of their control over resources, centralizing economic power in power centres further and further away from the people called the poor and marginalized. (It is perhaps more honest to call them the robbed, Dalits or the oppressed rather than the poor. These words indicate that there are structures and processes at work, which create deprivation, impoverishment, marginalization, indignities, and dehumanization.) Therefore it is extremely difficult to judge and say how successful AAI has been in doing Fighting Poverty Together (FPT). The only thing we can say is whether AAI is making genuine efforts to achieve its vision, mission and objectives.

## **The Methodological Thinking and Approach of the TS2 Team**

The four members of the TS2 team spent about three days in London to get to know each other and start the process of becoming a team. David Cohen, our team leader, an amazingly sensitive, gentle, experienced and committed person, helped create an informal, honest and joyous relationship with each other. Fortunately all of us blended together splendidly and ended up becoming very good personal friends. Later during our travel Irene Guijt who was reviewing ALPS joined us and became another precious member of the team. Working with this team was very pleasurable and enriching. A very valuable side effect of TS2.

The team agreed that given the time frame (very tight and inadequate) we were not in a position to do a proper review. As David Cohen put it, “informed observation is what we are doing”.

We agreed that our main methodology would be honest sharing and conversation. We will try to validate what people are doing. We will try to get the VOICES of the field people to the top people. We were all prepared to listen and to understand. We wanted TS2 to be a reflective and empowering process for everyone involved. All of us wanted it to be forward looking. The Team, we felt, should use its experience and knowledge to raise questions and make suggestions to help AAI move forward.

We were not looking to come up with necessarily bright new things, ideas, and suggestions. We saw the value and power even in reaffirming, reconfirming, repeating things others have found and said earlier.

## **No Dearth of Evaluative Reflection in AAI**

During our meetings with AAI staff at different levels, and reading many of AAI documents, we felt there is no shortage of critical reflection and questioning within AAI. Several staff members are more than aware of AAI's weaknesses, shortcomings and of the actions required to set them right. They also do not hesitate to articulate their views in meetings and in their writings. Most annual reports do not forget to mention weaknesses and failures. There is an openness and honesty about recognising shortcomings.

Earlier reviews have also been very good, perceptive, candid and at times ruthlessly honest. Hence, most of the questions being raised by us have or are being raised already within AAI. Therefore, most of our observations, questions and suggestions are echoes of existing thinking.

## **My Terms of Reference and this Report**

The TORs given to me by AAI were:

*“As team member your particular focus will be on Asia, gender issues, women's rights. You will be responsible for considering the aspects of this work that **relate to gender issues and women's rights throughout the organization.**”*

However, because gender, poverty, human rights are all integrally connected the team decided that in addition to our particular focus, the team members should/may give their views on Fighting Poverty Together, rights, partnership, internationalisation etc.

Therefore, I have written two reports. The first report focuses specifically on gender and women's rights. The second report, however, deals with my general observations on AAI's staff, working style; the challenges FPT and rights based approach have created; and my reflections on some reflective questions raised by the International Directors and other members of the AAI staff.

However, the questions, concerns, values and principles in the two reports are not separate. They are closely connected. The two reports have to be seen together.

It is necessary to add here that although I AM making suggestions, I do not feel right making recommendations on every or most points. I do not feel right because:

- a. It is not easy for me to assume I can make specific recommendations after such a short interaction with AAI
- b. I find there are enough people within AAI who know much more and know better. Also because earlier reviews have done this and quite well too
- c. The observations, questions and comments clearly point out what is required. If AAI wants it can take necessary actions on the basis of the observations, and finally
- d. I feel many concrete recommendations made by TS1 were not followed through. Maybe they were not doable or not worth doing. So, AAI knows better!!

I have tried to write the report in a style and language which is accessible. This is one of the reasons for its length.

To English speaking/writing people I must apologise for my English. This language continues to be my step mother (ly) tongue!! May be, as a feminist I should be saying "English is my step fatherly tongue, never quite in control. Always giving trouble.

# 1. Observations, Questions and Suggestions on AAI's Work for Achieving Gender Equity

## 1.1 Some Introductory Remarks

Based on what I saw during my visits, I am able to confirm the efforts and progress made towards the achievement of the gender goal in Fighting poverty together (FPT) and reported in the Annual Reports of ActionAid International.

There is ample critical and honest reflection within AAI regarding its performance on gender. AA staff (most of them in senior positions) are more than aware of the weaknesses and shortcomings of AAI's gender work and the actions required. They do not hesitate to articulate these shortcomings in meetings and in reports and other writings. Neither do most annual reports, internal reviews at all levels forget to mention weaknesses and shortcomings related to AAI's work on gender.

In addition, most external reviews on gender have been good and candid. They too have pointed out shortcomings and possible future directions. Here I would particularly like to mention the review done in 2001 by Mandy MacDonald for AAUK<sup>1</sup>, the 2003 AA Gender Review by Shamim Meer<sup>2</sup>, Gender Analysis work in projects in Ethiopia, Kenya and Vietnam, the Study of Gender Mainstreaming Experiences in Africa<sup>3</sup> etc. I appreciate and endorse the views expressed in these reports and suggestions and recommendations made.

Shamim Meer's Gender review was completed just a few months before TS2. She had more time at her disposal to review all policies, internal reports of meetings and reviews, country programme reports, reports of external reviews etc. She also had the benefit of interacting closely with the International Gender Coordinator. She sent out questionnaires to all country programmes to get their assessments and views on gender in AAI. She has done a point by point review and also made recommendation on every aspect of the gender work, in the context of AAI's Gender Policy.

I agree with and endorse what Shamim Meer has noted and recommended. As the audience of her and my review are the same, to avoid duplication, I have not commented on every point and aspect of AAI's work related to Gender Policy. Her very competent review is available for that and I have nothing new to add. Therefore, I suggest Shamim Meer's Review and mine be seen together as two parts of the same thing.

In this report I comment mainly on those issues and aspects I consider important and which require attention, for the achievement of gender related objectives of AAI.

I also endorse the perspective, and suggestions being made to AAI by the International Gender Coordinator. I have not met her, but reading some documents written by her, and the written inputs sent

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<sup>1</sup> STATE OF PLAY: Report of a desk review carried out as part of the Gender Mapping Exercise for Organizational Learning, ActionAid UK Mandy Macdonald 2001

<sup>2</sup> AA Gender Review 2003, Shamim Meer, 2003

<sup>3</sup> Gender Mainstreaming Experiences in West Africa, Southern Africa and Eastern Africa, ActionAid 2001

by her to the TS2 team, I find her to be knowledgeable, perceptive and committed. I find she has a sharp political understanding of issues related to gender, power and rights. There is a great deal of convergence between her perspective, views, suggestions and mine, but she has the advantage of knowing AAI much better than I do.

So, as the TS2 team felt right in the beginning, we are happy to reconfirm, reaffirm and repeat what has been said earlier, both on the progress made and the shortcomings. As already stated there has been no dearth of good analysis, diagnosis and good prescriptions for improvement. What is required now is creative, serious and sustained reflection and action on suggestions and recommendations already made and being repeated and/or being made by the TS2 team.

## **1.2 Considerable Progress Made Towards Gender Equity During the Last Five Years**

Since TS1, the organization has taken important steps towards the achievement of gender equity within the organization and in its programmes and campaigns. Below are some of the efforts and achievements made by AAI, its constituents and its partners. There is ample evidence, in the field, and in the reports and reviews of AAI work, to say-achievements have been many and at many levels. AAI has done well in relation to its goal of achieving gender equity. The gender work is work in progress and it needs to be strengthened, deepened, expanded and consolidated. Many aspects of this work could benefit from clearer and sharper analysis, conceptualisation and formulations.

## **1.3 Gender Goals Centrally Located in Fighting Poverty Together**

By making gender equity one of the four goals of its Poverty Eradication Strategy and the second strategic objective (out of six objectives) of its Organization Strategy, AAI has made a strong political statement. These objectives indicate AAI's political will to work towards gender equality. AAI has put women at the centre of its approach to poverty eradication through supporting women's rights and empowerment and working towards the creation of societies and communities which value women men, girls and boys equally.

The 2003 Annual report of AAI and some International Directors admit that progress on this goal remains mixed. However, there is ample evidence that efforts have been made in all countries and programmes to achieve this goal. An external review of AAI's gender work in 2003 shows that gender issues are now better integrated into its work and form a significant part of programmes and also of budget expenditure. A range of issues related to women's rights has been addressed. A large numbers of partnerships have been created around gender issues. These are all very positive and commendable efforts and achievements in a span of five years, in a large, international organization.

The declaration of FPT has been followed by a large number of policy, resource allocation, Human Resource/Organisational Development (HR/OD) and programmatic measures for achieving the objectives outlined in FPT.

## **1.4 A Comprehensive Gender Policy in Place**

Soon after adopting FPT, AAI put a Gender Policy in place according to which gender equality is to guide all AAI's policies and work. The Gender Policy states unequivocally that all AAI programmes and policies must have a gender perspective and lead to the empowerment of girls and women. The policy includes guidelines for developing a gender equity approach in planning in all aspects of AAI work, e.g. in programmes and campaign planning, monitoring and evaluation and HR/OD.

To respond to local realities and incorporate local issues, some Country Programmes have evolved and adopted country level gender policies and/or gender strategies. Like the Global Gender Policy, these too show the commitment of the organization and create a conducive atmosphere for gender related work. These policies stress gender sensitivity of all staff, mainstreaming of gender, gender related capacity building of AAI staff and the staff of AA partners, gender audits of activities etc.

These are very positive developments. Details and a critical, forward looking analysis of the work done on gender policy is well covered in Shamim Meer's review.

### **1.5 A Policy Against Sexual Harassment in Place**

Aware that even NGOs need not be free of sexual harassment, or power related sexual abuse of people, AAI has evolved and adopted a sexual harassment policy. This is also a necessary step in the right direction. However, sustained efforts are required to make these policies known to every staff member and to develop zero tolerance to any kind of gender, caste, class, race, religion, and sexual orientation related misconduct. In this context, the thinking and work related to diversity and inclusion in AAUK is commendable.

### **1.6 Attempts to Have Work Life Balance**

Being aware of the pressure, tension and conflicts long hours of work and frequent travel can create for the staff, especially for those with family responsibilities, discussions and actions have been initiated to create work life balance. In AAUK, for example, as part of their emerging "diversity and inclusion" strategy Family Friendly Policies are being put in place. Many staff members are using arrangements for flexi hours and job share. In Africa and Asia special provisions are made for breast feeding mothers, travel of men and women with small children, longer weekends once a month for wo/men posted in the field away from their families etc. These are necessary and good initiatives, which show the appreciation and sensitivity AAI has for its staff who are trying to give their best to the organization.

### **1.7 Special HR/OD Measures for the Recruitment of Women**

Conscious efforts have been made in many country programmes to increase the number of women in AAI at all levels, especially at the senior level. In AA Kenya, the number of women in senior management is more than that of men. As opposed to this, in some countries ManComs (management committees) are literally committees of men with just one or two women representatives. The positive aspect is the embarrassment seniors now feel while mentioning the low ratios. Hopefully instead of learning to live with embarrassment, these country programmes will slowly change the embarrassing situation. Although the results and ratios of wo/men vary from country to country, progress is being made in most places.

### **1.8 Some Gender Coordinators, Focal Points and Gender Working Groups in Place**

One International Gender Coordinator, country programme level full time Gender Coordinators in eight countries and a few Gender Coordinators in some regional offices (in countries) have been appointed to take the gender agenda forward. However, there are no fulltime Gender Coordinators any more in any of the regional Offices. Asia Region has a person giving 30 percent of her time for gender coordination. This is unfortunate.

In some countries there are part time Gender Coordinators. Compared to earlier times this is progress but for the task at hand gender posts are totally inadequate.

To provide more support and to institutionalize gender, Gender Focal Points and Gender Working Groups have also been established in some countries. This involvement of other staff in gender issues does help to mainstream and institutionalize gender, but that can happen only if proper terms of reference are in place.

### **1.9 Gender Issues Integrated in Marketing, Development Education and Media Work**

Serious attempts have been made to incorporate gender issues and particularly the issue of rights of girls and women by the Marketing and School programmes in the UK and Italy. There are very good educational materials being produced and used very widely specially in UK. AA Italy has produced some very powerful messages, posters, pamphlets on issues related to the rights of girls and women, particularly the rights of sex workers.

AAUK's exhibition on women and war is brave and excellent as it is raising very pertinent issues, very well. It will be good to see this exhibition also in the South. This kind of work is inspirational.

### **1.10 Incorporation of Gender in ALPS, REFLECT, Stepping Stones**

Gender has been integrated well in AAIs innovative Accountability, Learning and Planning System (ALPS). Whenever and wherever ALPS is seriously followed and a skilled gender person is involved, gender concerns do get looked into. Both REFLECT and Stepping Stones have integrated gender issues very well. Wherever these programmes are working well, even very sensitive gender issues and other power related issues are getting raised. These two programmes, if strengthened, could take the gender agenda forward.

### **1.11 Gender Related Capacity Building of Staff**

Efforts have been made by country programmes to sensitise their staff and build their capacities for incorporating gender into analysis, research, planning and monitoring and evaluation.

The quantity and quality of these trainings have varied from country to country. Some country programmes like AA Uganda, considered it necessary that everyone in the organization go through a gender sensitisation workshop to have an organization wide common understanding and commitment to gender. It also organised training of trainers (TOTs) for its staff to have an in-house team of trainers for conducting trainings for others in the organization.

In some countries, gender training covered attitudes and behaviour of people, in addition to their knowledge and skills. Most of these trainings have been conducted by outside trainers.

### **1.12 Many Projects for and with Women**

The Annual Reports of AAI, Country Programmes, Development Areas (DA's) and Development initiatives (DI's) and Shamim Meer's analysis of these reports show an increase in specific projects for/with women and related to the needs and concerns of girls and women. The conscious efforts made to increase the involvement of women has paid off. In every country visited, I saw and heard about women's projects. The vast majority of these revolved around micro credit or savings and credit. With the small loans received, women are undertaking small income generation activities like running small shops, poultry keeping, rearing pigs, goats or cows and vegetable gardening.

Another frequently seen women's project or women managed project is around water for household needs. Most of these projects are small, covering a few households. In some areas there are projects to

install water filters. There is one large and very successful and oft reported water project run by women in Tharaka, Kenya. The strength and success of the Tharaka Women Water Users' Association has enhanced the status of women and changed the attitudes of local people towards women and their management and leadership capacities.

### **1.13 Empowering Girls Through Education**

In many countries AAI is working in collaboration with local community based organisations (CBOs) and NGOs to provide basic education to girls and boys. In places where girls had no access to education earlier they are now in ACCESS centres supported or run by AAI and some of them are doing very well. I saw one ACCESS Centre in Ethiopia, where, girls and boys from a socially excluded minority community were attending a school for the first time. The community has built the school hut and they also contribute a little in cash or kind to cover the salary of the teacher.

In Kenya, AAI has been supporting the creation of Girls Fora in government schools, with the objective of developing leadership qualities in girls, encouraging them to improve their academic performance and initiating open dialogue on issues like violence against girls, early marriage and female genital mutilation (FGM). These are important initiatives and they need to be sustained and expanded.

### **1.14 Working With Women and Girls to Challenge Violence**

In many country programmes, including Bangladesh, Nepal, Pakistan, Kenya, Ethiopia, India and Vietnam, AAI in partnership with local organizations, is helping women and girls get organized and speak against different forms of violence against women and girls, like female foeticide and infanticide, FGM, early marriage, domestic violence, sexual harassment at the place of work.

AAI has also initiated and/or supported action research in some countries on violence against girls and women and declining ratio of girls to boys, to provide concrete evidence and improved analysis to help with policy and advocacy work.

### **1.15 Support to Girls and Women to Fight for their Rights**

Slowly a 'Rights Based Approach' is taking root but again, in some country programmes better than in others. In Africa and Asia work in partnership with local organizations is going on to support women's land rights, women's rights to political participation, right of girls to education and freedom from violence. In Asia there is work with women belonging to vulnerable and marginalised groups like -sex workers, trafficked girls and women, women in custodial institutions, very impoverished women of Musahar community, women involved with manual scavenging.

In Kenya, strong and large women's groups (Sauti Ya Wanawake or Voice of Women), have emerged to champion women's rights. They have recently started involving men in gender related issues and campaigns and have also initiated a dialogue with some religious leaders on religious/traditional practices violating women and their rights. These are all important initiatives, which need to be multiplied if they have to lead to structural changes.

### **1.16 Using Laws to Empower Girls and Women**

The rights perspective has encouraged AAI in some countries to partner with local organizations to advocate for better laws to protect the rights of girls, women, boys, and men specially those belonging to vulnerable groups. In Pakistan AAI is working in collaboration with local organizations to push for new

laws on sexual harassment and on women's land rights. In Kenya and Ethiopia work is going on with the help of Women's Legal Rights Groups to get gender related laws implemented. Similar efforts are on in other countries.

### **1.17 Building Capacities of Local CBOs and NGOs on Gender Issues**

The emphasis of FPT on working through partners has led to the creation of a very large number of partnerships with CBOs and NGOs in all country programmes. AAI has supported measures for capacity building, and institution building. Trainings on gender, counseling, micro credit, management of income generation programmes, legal issues, advocacy, leadership have been arranged. This kind of support in addition to funding support is greatly appreciated by partners.

### **1.18 Building Alliances for Gender Equality**

To create synergies and have a louder voice for policy and advocacy work AAI has joined, supported and or created networks or fora on gender issues. In Vietnam it is working closely with the Vietnam Women's Union, which has over 11 million members. In Kenya and Ethiopia it is working closely with women's rights groups like FIDA, Kenya, Ethiopian Women Lawyers Association. AAI is part of inter-organizational gender working groups which exist in many counties, consisting of UN, multilateral, bilateral agencies, international and national NGOs and in some countries also government departments.

### **1.19 National and International Programmes and Campaign on Gender Issues**

Some country programmes are beginning to have relations with the local women's movement to advocate for improved policies and laws against violence, accesses and control over natural resources, land ownership, women and HIV /AIDS, women's political participation etc.

Asia has had an international campaign against trafficking of girls and women. A gender perspective and women's concerns have been incorporated in AAI's global campaigns in education and HIV/AIDS. Recently, the Food Rights Campaign of AAI has also made efforts to get some studies done on the impact of food and trade policies on women and involving women and women's issues more centrally in the campaign.

In 2003, AAI was represented at the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) in New York, where the global women's movement raised its voice against increasing fundamentalism of all kinds and varieties (including market fundamentalism), increasing violence, conflict and insecurities as a result of 9/11 and Mr. Bush's "War Against Terrorism". Involvement of AAI in such fora is a step in the rights direction.

What has helped AAI connect with the women's movement in some countries is the fact that in the last few years some well known feminist activists (e.g. Nasreen Huq, Fawzia Sayeed, Everjoice Win, Anchita Ghatak) have joined AAI in some important positions. These feminists are not only initiating and strengthening gender related initiatives inside, but also actively linking up with feminist organizations and women's movement.

### **1.20 The Integrated Approach has Successfully Pushed the Women's Rights Agenda**

All the above initiatives have added up to help women have access to resources, deal with violence of all kinds, gain participation in decision making within households, and in social and political organizations.

Some programmes report improved educational opportunities for girls and an increase in women's confidence and bargaining power. A study on micro credit initiatives in Vietnam reports increased participation of a few husbands in household chores. In Tharaka, and in the Coast region in Kenya, successful projects run by women and the emergence of strong women's groups has gained more respect for women amongst community leaders and local government authorities. These are all praiseworthy efforts and achievements. However, what one has to see is for each successful initiative, how many below average and unimpressive projects are there?

In the next phase and level of work AAI needs to see if these efforts can be strengthened and multiplied to lead to changes in gender relations and improve not just women's **condition** but also their **position**.

## 2. Some Observations, Questions and Suggestions on the Conceptualisation of Gender in AAI

FPT has definitely put gender quite prominently on the AAI agenda. Consequently there has been considerable progress. There are however some observations and questions on some formulations in the FPT document, AAI Gender Policy, and some other documents. As stated in an AAI document work has to be based or grounded in clear conceptual understanding because it is from there that effective and focussed strategies start. A discussion on the following observations could lead to sharper formulations and improved strategies and programmes in the next phase of AAI's work.

### 2.1 Ghettoisation of Gender

Although gender equity has been made a prominent separate objective both in the Poverty Eradication and Organization Strategy of FPT, gender concerns are not adequately included in the other objectives and sections. In most other places terms like poor, people, households, communities are used which render women and their concerns invisible. AAI has declared gender to be a cross cutting issue. Therefore, this policy required clearer and concrete spelling out of gender concerns in each of the prioritised areas and disaggregation of terms like poor, people, households to ensure women are not invisible in the "non gender" sections and gender is not ghettoised. In her gender review Kiran Bhatia had clearly pointed out these shortcomings. She wrote and I agree with her:

*"The risk of losing this focus is increased as one reads the document. In most parts, except the section on gender equity, "poor and marginalised people" are the major reference. Occasionally, "women, men, boys and girls" are stated. However the underlying premise is still approaching households and communities as composite units. The power inequities within the households are a well established fact, even known to AA since 1995, as are the false assumptions of collective "well being of families and communities". Without further unpacking of these generalisations in the strategic objective 'empowering poor and marginalised people' and "promoting basic rights", such false assumptions may be reaffirmed. The challenge is to state gender dimensions separately to ensure legitimacy and visibility as this strategy has certainly done. But also to relate it to all other core strategic objectives to confirm that the agency believes gender to be a core part of all strategic planning and interventions. This is not fully achieved".*

*"Similarly, Goal Two, "the strengthening of the anti poverty movement" and the goal "mitigating constraints to poverty eradication", completely lack a gender dimension, probably on the assumption that it is dealt within the gender section. When there is a recognition that seventy percent of the poor are women and institutions at the macro level are also gender blind and male biased, should this reality not be stated throughout the text? More so when it is accepted that the realities and impact of poverty are different for men and women. There seems to be hesitation to restate the disaggregated dimensions of all*

*the strategic objectives. Such hesitation is usually considered more common when gender is treated as rhetoric than an integral part.”*

Perhaps as a result of this shortcoming in the main policy documents, **the principle “gender is cross cutting in AAI” is not internalised by a large section of the staff** except by those responsible for gender , who are at times hitting their heads against the walls created either by lack of understanding, sensitivity or by resistance to gender.

Many presentations by International Directors, Country Directors and Regional Managers during our visits showcased the above. Long presentations, sometimes nicely power pointed, would have no mention of gender, except as just one separate point. That separate point would also be limited to mentioning number of women and women’s participation. No more than that. **Gender continues to mean women to most people in AAI.**

When we asked the presenters “what about gender” we were told (by an HR manager who did the PowerPoint presentation) “the gender coordinator can tell you that” or “ my presentation was not on gender” (a DA Manager in Vietnam) . But when it comes to staffing i.e. lack of dedicated gender staff, the AA seniors say, they believe in gender mainstreaming, hence no need for special gender people. Gender loses out both ways. This is the “Lose Lose Situation” gender concerns seem to be stuck in.

Except in Vietnam, the only country programme other than Brazil, where the gender coordinator is included in the Management Committee (rightly called MANcom in country programmes where mainly men are part of it), gender coordinators were not part of our meetings, briefings, and debriefings with senior managers. What the logic or compulsion to downplay or devalue gender like this is (in spite of the fact that in policy statements gender is central) I have neither been able to understand nor appreciate.

Gender is also largely absent or ghettoised in most AAI documents except of course in the special reviews on/of gender work. In spite of the gender policy and gender being one of the four objectives of FPT, out of 19 two page fact sheets about AA Country Programmes which I was given, 13 had no section on gender<sup>4</sup>. How Country Directors can allow such sheets to be prepared and how others in AAI can allow them to be printed and widely distributed is difficult to understand. How can gender continue to be optional? How can 13 out of 19 Country Directors not have gender on their mind and in their country fact sheet? If gender is a policy matter, this is a breach of policy as it displays a total disregard for stated goals, strategies and policies. How can this be allowed, condoned, left uncorrected?

Many policy documents have little or nothing on gender. It is the same with documents on advocacy. Even documents related to agriculture, food security, are often largely “gender free” in spite of the fact these are of great concern to women and a large number of women are actually involved in these activities.

Some prime examples of “gender free” documents or of documents where gender is mentioned ONLY as a separate , small para, are

- AA Vietnam’s Framework for the Period from 2001-2005
- Ha Tinh (AA Vietnam) Programme Strategy 2001-05
- Assessment of AA Vietnam Agriculture Programme in Can Loc District, Ha Tinh province 1997-2002
- India Country Review 2004. This quite lengthy document has a very short and separate section on gender. When asked why, one of the reviewers said, “we were reviewing the **absence of gender**

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<sup>4</sup> Fact Sheets produced by AA UK

everywhere so there was not much to write” “ there was a lot of sloganisation on gender but no internalisation”. She further added that the gender coordinator was not present in the discussions between the Review Team and AA India, hence even the briefing on gender was missing.

- Even the otherwise excellent reports of the Uganda review process by Tina Wallace and Allan Kaplan have surprisingly little on gender.

These are just a few documents at hand at this moment to be mentioned by name. They are however representative of a large number of “gender free” or “gender in ghetto” documents that exist.

Many Country Programmes have well written comprehensive and very ambitious gender strategy documents stating that gender will be integrated into every programme. The spirit of this document is however often not reflected in the country strategy documents. Again, one finds gender ghettoised in a small, separate section of these strategies. The gender coordinators if they exist are perhaps not powerful enough to point this out to their seniors and get it corrected. The extremely harmful result of this is that those members of staff who do not read the gender strategy and gender sections of documents, never need to read or hear about gender. For them gender remains the concern of the gender people.

### **2.3 Absence of In-depth and Clear Analysis on Gender Subordination**

Neither in the FPT policy document nor elsewhere, have I seen any in-depth analysis of gender subordination or inequalities, or a comprehensive perspective on gender. I have also not seen the word patriarchy in (m) any AAI documents. Patriarchy is the system responsible for creating gender inequalities. Can causes of gender inequality be addressed without even naming the system, analysing it and understanding its origin?

Private property, family and religion are the pillars of patriarchy (and of class and caste, for that matter). They keep the system going. These however are the “holy cows” in the development sector. One seldom sees any position papers, strategies, and campaigns on these holy cows. Most of the time there is only one thing on them-deafening silence. It’s the same in AAI.

### **2.4 Gender Inequalities Seen Only in the Context of Poverty**

The way gender concerns are worded in FPT and in the Gender Policy of AAI and the way some senior people spoke about it, it seems gender is a problem only in relation to poverty!! Just that!! It is not a problem otherwise and elsewhere. If this is how it is formulated, AAI can be accused of the following thinking. “Gender is `their’ problem. It is a problem “out there” . The non-poor, people in the North and in the HQs in the South, have nothing to do with it! It is a problem of the field. It is a problem of the poor. The rich and the educated don’t have this disease called patriarchy, like they don’t have TB, HIV/AIDS, or lice in their hair!! No, the rich are okay. The members of the Board of Trustees are okay. The managers in country programmes are okay too. No, they don’t need gender sensitization workshops. And they will lay down gender policies without knowing what gender is. And what is there to know about gender anyway? If you live with women, you know gender. In any case we were not interested in gender. That is why till very recently we didn’t have a gender policy. Then suddenly political correctness took us over. After that we had to not only have a gender policy but also sexual harassment policy, work life balance policy!!” This is surely not how AAI thinks?

It is necessary that AAI clearly states that patriarchy is a global system, that subordination of women is universal, although the nature and extent of it can be different from place to place and time to time. Clarity and clearer statements on the global nature of patriarchy are more necessary now in an

internationalised AA. People in the South can be quite sensitive to assumptions like gender inequality is only their problem. A global perspective will strengthen global partnerships to fight patriarchy.

## **2.5 Conceptual Confusion Around the Term Gender**

Strategic objective 4.1 of the FPT document is “Strengthening local strategies for gender empowerment”. As far as I know, there can be nothing like gender empowerment. Gender is the social definition of women, men, girls and boys which determines their dress, roles, responsibilities, rights, control over resources, mobility, aspirations and everything else. Gender is also a neutral term. It means neither equality nor inequality. It is a social construct which can be equal or unequal, although normally the way gender is constructed in most patriarchal societies, men and boys are considered superior and they have more control over resources, decision making and ideology. So, as far as empowerment is concerned, it can only be of those who have been disempowered by patriarchy and they are women and girls.

It is difficult to say whether this was a mistake or a desire not to offend or frighten men. Both are possible, specially because the document constantly clubs women, men, girls and boys. (see a discussion on this in the next section).

As regards confusion about the concept of gender is concerned, some feminists have always said gender is a confusing concept. It can easily be misused and misrepresented. This is why many feminists in the South were not happy to see the sudden popularity of the concept of gender. Suddenly everyone, really everyone, including those who violate women and their rights started to happily use this concept. The concept lends itself to misrepresentation, multiple definitions, hence wooliness. More often than not, the word gender hides more than it reveals, blunts our analysis more than it sharpens, pacifies more than enrages. It is not a struggle concept and that is why it has depoliticised feminist agendas. It has taken away the sharpness, the sting, and the urgency. And as someone in AAI put it aptly – you cannot be engaged without being enraged.

It is quite clear that some serious and systematic work is required on conceptual clarity, at all levels. If structural changes are desired then the desire not to offend anyone, in this case men if they dominate, exploit, abuse, violate has to be given up. If we wish to work on causes of poverty and women’s subordination, then it is necessary to call a spade a spade. Analytical sharpness, which is necessary for making clear strategies, requires using terms like patriarchy, exploitation, oppression, impoverishment, rather than only using terms like poverty and gender all the time.

## **2.6 The Constant Clubbing of Women, Men, Girls and Boys Is Depoliticising the Issue**

Goal 4 of FPT is “Gender Equity will be enhanced”. The opening para is “ we will work to enable poor women, girls, men and boys to exercise equal rights and achieve equal well being, influence and status”.

As far as working with and empowering the whole community is concerned, the earlier objectives cover it. The need for a separate goal on gender arises only because women and girls have been subordinated. Here “Taking Sides” is necessary, taking side of girls and women because they have been shoved aside for too long. In the context of gender, constantly clubbing women, men, girls and boys is like clubbing rich and poor in the context of poverty.

Under the same Goal 4 it is said “we will focus on the empowerment of women and girls with the support of men and boys to organise, mobilise and advocate for gender equity.” What about places where boys and men are not willing to support girls and women? Also, can one always and everywhere begin by taking men and boys along to empower women? Has this been done any where? If this can and should be done, then why not also talk of involving the rich, while working with the poor, involving the upper

castes while organising the dalits? Aren't gender power relations also hierarchical and exploitative? Aren't men's interests often against those of women?

Goal 4 is a good example of depoliticising women's struggles, by not at all mentioning that women have been robbed of power, resources, identity, dignity, autonomy (also) by men, who are sometimes their own fathers, brothers, husbands, sons, sometimes they are their own community and religious leaders. Its men who abuse and rape them. This is why the concept of patriarchy is much sharper, clearer. It names the oppressor. It says who is the oppressor and who the oppressed. Gender inequality, on the other hand, can mean girls and women are deprived or men and boys are deprived. Gender is a good academic concept. Academically women and men can both be deprived. But don't we know in most cases who is deprived? Academically upper and lower castes, bourgeoisie and proletariat, whites and blacks, North and South can all be exploited by the other. But don't we know in most cases who exploits whom? If AAI can clearly take sides with the poor, why hesitate to take sides equally forcefully with women and girls amongst the poor communities?

The language of the FPT document on gender is indeed mixed and therefore confused and confusing. The overall impression one gets from it is that AAI still accepts and subscribes to the completely outdated and discredited theory of harmonious households and communities, where women, girls, men and boys live happily together. It is now widely accepted that it is more the conflict-cooperation model which operates in real life. Therefore different interests and power situations of men, women, girls and boys need to be recognised and challenged. The document fails to convey this clearly and sharply and in doing so depoliticises the struggle for gender equality.

In her Gender Review Shamim Meer and in several documents the International Gender Coordinator of AAI, also talk of depoliticisation of the gender agenda by NGOs. South Asian feminists have also been saying this. AAI needs to look deeper into these issues and luckily it has some competent and committed people to facilitate and take forward this important task.

## **2.7 Men and Masculinities Not Analyzed and Challenged**

The AAI Gender Policy states "working with a gender perspective means involving and engaging men and boys in order to improve the status of women and girls". There are similar statements in the FPT document. What these statements mean is not clear. It is high time everyone clearly understood and stated that men and boys don't just have to help girls and women, **they themselves have to change** if women and girls are to be empowered; men and boys have to give up some rights (to property, leisure, decision making for example) if women and girls are to gain more rights; men and boys have to shun aggressive, hegemonic notions of masculinity if girls and women are to be safe and have autonomy; men and boys have to take on the responsibility of household and child rearing work if girls and women are to get educated and participate in public life; men and boys have to change their attitudes and behaviour in order to accept women and girls as equals, to respect women's rights and autonomy, to acknowledge their contribution. Men and boys have also to realise how patriarchy has deprived many of them of positive human qualities like nurturing caring, gentleness. Work on men and masculinity needs urgent and ample attention and resources to take the gender agenda to the next level. As a first step, this issue needs to be included in AAI policies.

## **2.8 Lack of Clarity on What AAI Aspires For-Gender Equity or Gender Equality or Both?**

Gender equity is the preferred term in all AAI documents. It is difficult to say why this is so. May be gender equity was used to go beyond the (limited and limiting) concept of "equal opportunity". Equity

means fairness, special consideration for special needs or in special situations and contexts. Because most women have special biological roles (they produce and breast feed children) and because they have gender roles, restrictions, constraints imposed upon them, they (might) need special treatment and affirmative actions. The historical injustices done to women require positive discrimination in their favour to bring them at par with men. This is why gender equity is necessary. But can /should we stop at equity? Can/should we give up equality as a goal? Doesn't AAI want equal rights for women? Right to education, health, land, credit?

Most feminists feel we have to strive for both equity and equality for women (and for other historically deprived and marginalized groups of people). AAI needs to think about these terms and decide what it wishes to achieve and which terms are more appropriate for that.

### **3. Some Observations, Questions and Suggestions on the Operationalisation of Gender**

*“Fighting poverty together has challenged many of the previous assumptions and put the struggle for women’s rights at the heart of our new approach. This policy statement is deliberately light in detail but clear in our resolve. It is for each one of us who make up Action Aid to show to ourselves and the world outside, particularly the poor women and girls who wage their daily battle against discrimination and injustice, that we mean every word we say. It is for people in leadership positions to demonstrate their commitment in practice-to give their own time and allocate adequate resources. This means big changes in both our behaviour and actions at all levels. It also means intolerance of any forms of behaviour that run counter to this policy statement”*

Written in October 2000 by Salil Shetty, in the introduction to the AAI Gender Policy, these were strong words, full of commitment and hope. The sense of vigour and deep sense of commitment contained in these words is sadly not reflected in the thinking and actions of many people and in the implementation of many policies, programmes and campaigns. However, attempts are still being made to live up to these aspirations and promises. The constant striving is what matters.

The following have been my main observations and concerns on the way gender is being handled in documents, in HR/OD, programmes and campaigns. These remarks in no way deny the efforts and progress already made. As FPT, including the goal of gender equity, is still work in progress, shortcomings and failures are bound to be there. The observations, questions and reflective comments are being made to initiate forward looking dialogues and reflections to improve the work in progress and strengthen the resolve and potential of the wonderful people working with AAI for the achievement of FPT goals.

#### **3.1 Lack of Clarity on Gender Concepts, Issues and Debates**

Clarity and shared understanding on concepts and issues is an absolute prerequisite for having commitment to gender equity and equality and for developing effective strategies and programmes to achieve women’s empowerment and gender equality. However, I found that there is lack of clarity and shared understanding, even amongst the International Directors who are expected to lead and inspire others.

Within AAI the word gender is used a lot but it seemed without being understood at all or in depth, by many if not most. The quick exercises I dared to do with the International Directors and the staff in four

country programmes to ascertain how well the concept of gender was understood within AAI, revealed that the majority could not define gender precisely and clearly. This lack of clarity and consequent lack of collective understanding by staff can hardly help promote meaningful work towards equality of men and women. This lack of clarity and common understanding also creates unnecessary debates, misunderstandings, and even conflicts.

A very senior HR person in AAUK said to me (twice), gender had nothing to do with women's rights! The International Director for Policy, on the other hand, writes "we should make the switch to talking of women's rights not just gender...we need a sharper goal around women's rights. Our best work seems to happen when we link with women's rights groups". Such divergence in understanding and views at the very top level cannot help AAI achieve gender equality. Clarity, shared understanding and commitment require a great deal of frank and honest discussion at all levels and I found this missing.

Some HR and other people in the UK office said gender was not an issue there, "here we talk only of work life balance. Diversity is an issue here, not gender". Indeed work life balance and diversity are issues but within these isn't gender also an issue? And even if all gender disparities have been removed within AAUK isn't gender an issue for the policy, marketing, publicity and media work? If it is, then don't HR/OD departments have to ensure that colleagues understand gender, power, and rights? If this is so, then gender surely is still an issue, isn't it?

There are other examples of lack of clarity on gender. For example in some documents the work "gender empowerment" is used. This would make sense only if gender is taken as a synonym of women, (which it is by many within AAI.). Otherwise, there is nothing like gender empowerment. Such confusions need to be removed.

Gender as a concept is relatively new and unless you study it or somebody explains it, you cannot know it. Unfortunately the way a large number of gender workshops and trainings are conducted, they fail to make people understand and internalize the concept.

According to a senior AAI woman manager, most senior managers do not know much about gender but they are not willing or able to admit this. They pretend they know it all, and this is what leads to confusion, resistance, and in some cases, hostility.

TS1 did not mince words (and quite rightly so) about the lack of clear understanding of gender issues at the very "top" level in AAI and made a strong recommendation that members of the Board and Senior Managers participate in gender workshops. Sadly no action has been taken on this very important recommendation. Gender workshops for senior managers would have made a huge difference to the progress on gender issues and it would have sent strong and positive messages to the staff at other levels. People learn more by seeing than by hearing lectures or reading policy statements. Senior managers **not** participating in gender workshops, not championing gender, not including gender in their presentations, also sends a very strong message i.e. gender is NOT important; it can be ignored or left to the gender coordinator, if she is there, or just left.

### **3.2 Doubts About Mainstreaming OR Dedicated Gender Staff and Programme Continue**

Some senior managers continue to say that because gender is a cross cutting issue it should be mainstreamed. Hence, there is no need for dedicated staff for gender. I thought such debates would have been settled. Most organisations feel and rightly so, that one has to walk on both legs or have dedicated staff PLUS make efforts to mainstream. Mainstreaming is a process, a difficult and time consuming process too. Mainstreaming itself requires dedicated staff and resources. A clear statement from the top

and actions, in the form of additional staff for gender and more resources for capacity building work, should put an end to these unnecessary doubts and debates.

### **3.4 Lack of Understanding and Discussion on Patriarchy and Feminism**

I was surprised not to find the word patriarchy in any AAI documents and in the discussions. Patriarchy, the social system responsible for gender inequalities and women's subordination, is not named or acknowledged.

In almost every country programme, one felt discussion on power and hierarchy between women and men was being avoided. Some women in AAI also said "the organization does not want to offend men". This fear of alienating men while working on gender (seen a lot during the review) needs to be shed if AAI wants to achieve gender equality. Also, a sharper analysis and use of terms and tools of analysis like patriarchy and power does not mean one takes these as banners to the communities or one uses them insensitively. Sensitivity is required whatever words you use, because basically the issue of gender, like the issue of class, caste, race or North/South, is about recognising and confronting power relations. And all power related work requires sensitivity along with clear analysis and ability to understand and handle conflict.

While discussing power relations between men and women, one does not have to be confrontational. However, often just talking about power relations is seen as a confrontation. One has to be aware of this. While engaging with men and boys on gender issues we have to not only make them see all the privileges they have had and continue to have, but also what they are deprived of as men in patriarchal societies e.g. gentleness, qualities of nurturing and caring, the freedom to express emotions, to cry, to admit weakness and vulnerabilities. One has to make men aware how patriarchy has led to their dehumanisation by prescribing and imposing machoism or hegemonic masculinity for/on men. In the final and deeper analysis **gender equality is about finding a balance between the masculine and feminine, ying and yang, within each one of us.**

Empowerment of women should definitely not mean women becoming aggressive and masculine. **Being vigilant about misuse of power** related to gender, race, class, etc, **is an ongoing process.** Doing one workshop, one retreat, writing a memo is not adequate. It requires dismantling our egos, our endless lust for power, control, visibility etc.

The word **feminism** is also conspicuous by its absence in AAI documents. That thinking and activism (feminism) which is responsible for initiating and carrying forward the fight for women's rights, is not mentioned, acknowledged, appreciated. "If you call yourself a feminist, you are considered a dinosaur here" said a woman in AAI London.

It is necessary to acknowledge that feminists are the main people (women and men) who have fought for gender equality and women's empowerment for decades, if not centuries. It's because of their efforts that gender has become a central, cross cutting issue. Therefore it is essential to understand and engage with feminisms (as there is not one, hegemonic, universal feminism, it is better to talk of feminisms). Feminist struggles have been and should be context specific (just as struggles against poverty are). To achieve gender equality partnerships with feminist organizations and movements are necessary. The FPT document itself and many gender reviews have recommended these partnerships.

### **3.5 However, Challenging Patriarchy is Neither Easy Nor Instant**

Patriarchy is deeply entrenched almost everywhere; in all modern religions (modern as against earlier forms of nature worship, worship of goddesses and the feminine principle) in societal institutions including the family and in the psyche of most human beings. Even in those countries, where because of longstanding struggles by the women's movement and other movements for democracy and human rights, one sees patriarchal thinking and traditions alive and kicking. In the US there are Kennedy and Bush Seniors and Juniors. No one has heard of Ms. Bush Junior or Ms. Kennedy Senior! Scandinavia is still full of names ending with SON-Eriksson, Jacobson and everybody else's son. Women are called Mary Jacobson!! (Honorary "sonships" awarded to women?) Women do not have their own names. They take the name of the man they get attached to. Girls were not to inherit family - names, property or professions from their fathers. Two weeks ago a member of the People's Committee of a District in Vietnam said, even today there are proverbs like ' If you have 10 girls you have no child. You have a child only when there is a son' (Phallus worship?).

Confucius, Hindu, Christian or Muslim patriarchies are deep. Even after becoming dormant they can re-emerge, like in China. In China, Chairman's Mao's attacks on patriarchy were comprehensive. Still the genie of patriarchal thinking resurfaced in the form of female foeticide when the one child policy was introduced. I can go on and on...

Challenging the deep, all pervasive, structure and ideology of patriarchy (or of class, race, North-South) is not easy. Including it as a goal in FPT is much easier.

In my own life, the biggest challenge was created the day I had this rather dangerous desire to work for gender equality. Life has not been the same since the day this desire touched me. The desire for gender equality sets everything, literally everything, on fire. Nothing can remain unquestioned after that. The first person who does and should stand in the witness box is you yourself and it does not matter whether you are a man or a woman, a girl or a boy.

Patriarchal thoughts, beliefs, attitudes and behavioural patterns are deep in each one of us. They are part of our psyche and our subconscious. We are required to question all of them and tell me who wants to indulge in such a painful exercise!! This is why even many strong and successful women declare that they are not feminists.

The other big problem with raking, waking the gender genie is that it disturbs your most intimate relationships, relationships with your father, brother, husband, even mother, mother-in-law etc. Therefore, gender concerns CANNOT be just 9 to 5 concerns. They cannot be merely external, externally oriented concerns. Here charity HAS to begin at home. This is why the most popular slogan given by feminists is "**The personal is the political**". This slogan means many things.

Changing gender relations requires, most and first of all changing ourselves; ourselves as persons and as organizations (families, schools, charities, CSOs, NGOs, donors)

Gender, therefore, is not just a technical fix. A few frameworks here and there, adding and stirring does not change things. It has to permeate our whole being, or it does not work. And changing our whole being at the personal and organizational level is a slow process even when every one in the organization is committed to change. We have to peel layers after layers, and more layers of deeply entrenched patriarchal thoughts and behavioural patterns, in both men and women. This work requires time, resources, and commitment.

The same is true for principles of rights, diversity, partnership etc., which also require changing power structures. Sustained and sometimes painful efforts are required to challenge existing power structures. Simply making policies and statements does NOT help.

### **3.6 Use of Words Male, Female**

In most country programmes, the words male and female were used to refer to men and women staff members, community members, officers etc. I find this usage a little problematic and also disrespectful. Male, female are terms for the biological male or female of any species. Therefore, by themselves these terms do not mean men and women. Secondly, these terms refer to the biological functions of women and men. While talking of AAI staff or of members of the community, we are seldom talking of their biological functions. Hence, I feel, it is more appropriate to use the words men and women except when we are referring to the biological functions of people.

### **3.7 Few at the Top are Championing Gender**

Several people within the organization think AAI is quite hierarchical. There are many grades and grades make a difference to who is taken seriously, whose word is a command and whose can be ignored. This being the case, for the gender agenda to make headway, people at the top need to champion it. Unfortunately, there are not many senior people championing gender.

Several women mentioned the absence of people championing the cause of gender transformation and gender equality. “There is no one at the top who is passionate about women’s rights, neither a man nor a woman”, “There is lack of political will at the top”, “No one on the top really cares”. “They say they care but this is not reflected in their action and resource allocations. “Good things have happened on gender issues because of the initiative and commitment of an individual woman or man, not because of HR/OD policies, organizational efforts or inputs.”

In their five to seven minute presentations to our Review Team on major concerns/questions for the TS2 process, seven out of ten International Directors did not even mention the word gender or women. The other three mentioned it in one sentence; basically to say AAI had not done much on gender. In this meeting of senior most people, one definitely did not get a feeling of being amongst people advocating for gender equality.

In one country programme, in the three hour presentation by the Director and members of the ManCom (Management Committee), except for mentioning the ratio of women and men staff within the country programme, there was no mention of gender concerns, foci, achievements etc. In the long HR/OD power point presentation by the woman director, even the gender policy was not mentioned. Most country presentations were similar. Gender was mentioned as a separate section only. In other presentations, for example on policy, advocacy, HR/OD campaigns etc, gender was conspicuously absent.

This marginalisation of gender was also evident in the fact that during the gender review by Shamim Meer only about 20 % senior people sent in their views/reflections /case studies on gender in AAI. One wonders if anything was said or done to those 80% who did not respond and if such lapses would be tolerated in financial or management reviews.

### **3.8 In AAI, Gender Is an Issue OF, BY and FOR Women**

An AAI person made the above statement and there is a lot of truth in it. All full timers working on gender are women. Most (not all) champions for women’s rights and gender equality are women. Gender activities are mainly of, by and for women. Gender is understood by many as an equivalent of women and little else. Actions need to be taken to dispel these impressions. The biggest step in this direction will be

championing of gender equality by senior women and women. It will be good to have some men in gender positions.

### **3.9 Disrespect for those Responsible for Gender: Its Rare but There**

Gender concerns are well integrated and there are many achievements in terms of reaching women but I found one senior manager had little respect for any gender expertise or gender experts. This very experienced, articulate and self assured DI coordinator made extremely disparaging comments on women working on gender in the presence of the gender policy and programme officer of AA. These comments were neither necessary, nor correct, nor pleasant. The main thrust of the comments was that women working on gender are upper class, not in touch with rural realities, have no commitment and nothing much to offer. They spend all their time conferencing in fancy hotels. He also seemed to be saying there is nothing to learn on gender. It was sad and surprising to see such sentiments expressed by an otherwise very good and committed worker and also someone who is a prominent member of the Gender Working Group at the country programme level.

### **3.10 Totally Inadequate Staff for Achieving Gender Equity**

For an organization working in over 35 countries, with a staff of over 2000, working with thousands of CBOs, NGOs, government departments etc. there is ONE full time position on gender at the international level. AND she has no staff and logistics support. In her own words, she is “a one woman band.”

Her main role is externally facing; building partnerships, initiating and supporting campaigns etc. Only a fraction of her time is for internal HR/OD support. The rationale for this totally inadequate staff situation is that AAI has now mainstreamed gender, hence it is now everyone’s responsibility. The reality however is that very few people have adequate understanding of gender. In most programmes, gender means little more than women. Gender relations, gender division of labour, men, masculinities are not being addressed in most programmes. Most reviews say not many changes have taken place in the **position** of women. Many policy and advocacy documents continue to be “gender free”. Gender is nowhere near being mainstreamed in AAI. The **ownership** of the gender agenda is even weaker.

Hence, having a one person gender unit is totally inadequate and unrealistic. Not just staff, even the resources with the gender unit are inadequate. The International Gender Coordinator’s entire annual budget in 2004 is \$ 132000. This includes salaries. Putting a person in this kind of a situation is a sure recipe for her failure and the failure of the organization in moving closer to achieving the objective of gender equity and equality. Some women in AAI said, the unrealistic expectations and unbearable burden of work is responsible for several good women leaving the organization. Commenting on the impossible task the International Gender Coordinator feels she will soon get burnt out and not be able to deliver even on one thing. AAI must realise how much it can expect from its staff, specially from women, who are normally the ones handling responsibilities of their own families and children.

The situation of gender responsables is worse at the moment in the Regional offices and no better in most country programmes. None of the Regional offices has a full time gender person any more. Asia has a person devoting 30% of her time to gender and the others have no one. For Africa, it is said, there are no funds for a gender coordinator.

Only eight CPs have a full time gender person.

In a programme as large as in India, there is one programme person for gender, with no other staff to help her. Such a situation can only paralyse and demoralise a person. Actually, this devalues the objective itself. And doesn’t it make the organization seem flippant and non-serious about its own objectives? Why

have an objective if there is no desire or no resources or both to implement it seriously? One used to think only political leaders make promises, which they have no intentions or no resources to fulfil.

Compared to other areas of work in AAI gender has received much fewer resources. In Kenya for example at this moment HIV/AIDS work has eight full time persons, child sponsorship has six persons in the central office and one part time person in every DI. There are six capacity building accountants to help CBOS and NGOs develop accounts related capabilities so that the policy of “Zero Tolerance to Corruption” can be implemented. These six are in addition to accountants in every office. For gender, only now there is a full time coordinator at the national level. Earlier there was one person handling both funding and gender, and according to her she spent most of her time on fund raising. In only one out of four regions is there a full time gender coordinator. In the other three regions there are only part time gender coordinators and they spend most of their time on their other responsibilities (like HIV) because those have more urgent and concrete tasks. For them gender issues do not seem too urgent or concrete, hence they devote little time to gender.

In India also, AA has a nine member team for Internal Audit. So where they want implementation, accountability and audit, AAI managers know what to do and how to do it. **Rights and gender, the two areas that should be the soul of the organization, are starved of resources and attention.**

In many countries Gender Focal Points are appointed to work on the gender agenda at the DA/DI level. However in every CP I visited the focal persons are handling the gender responsibility in addition to their main responsibility of some other programme. There are no clear specifications on how much time they are to devote to gender. The result is that most of them are doing practically nothing on/for gender. In many places there are no TORs for the gender focal persons. The impression I had was that the gender focal persons are more for the sake of form. Consequently the Gender Working Groups, wherever they exist, don't seem to be working effectively.

The Gender Coordinators I met are alone and often lonely and lost, not knowing how to take the gender work forward. Two of them said they are not getting much support and they are not being taken seriously. They said they themselves needed more skills and experiences. They felt the organization need to make investments to build their capacities to help them become more effective.

### **3.11 Gender Staff Not Part of Senior Management**

Neither at the international nor at the country level (except in Vietnam) and Brazil the person in charge of gender is part of the Senior Management Team. Most of the strategic thinking is done and decisions are taken at this level. Because of the absence of the gender person for this forum, gender may or may not be taken into account in the decisions made on policies, strategies, programmes, budgets, staffing etc. Doesn't this illustrate how the important objective of gender equality is valued and treated?

The absence of the gender person in the senior management team would not be such a big problem if the Senior Managers understood and were personally committed to gender equity. This however is not the case in spite of the fact that gender equity is one of the four organizational objectives.

A person in a junior position is unable to get things done, especially in a fairly hierarchical organization like AAI. Not considering gender and the gender person important enough to be part of the senior management sends out a clear message to everyone within the organization and to the partners, about the lack of importance given to this issue. This is in spite of the fact that several reviewers have recommended an elevation for the gender persons and the gender agenda.

What conclusions should/can one draw from this lack of importance given to gender responsibilities, issues and the lack of serious actions on the internal and external reviews and their clear and forceful recommendations? **Of what value are all the reviews and their recommendations!!**

AAI does need to think about and answer these questions.

### **3.13 Inadequate Efforts for Perspective and Team Building on Gender, Power and Rights**

It is people who make organizations. On rights, gender and other power related issues, people's attitudes and behaviours are as important as stated organizational policies and strategies. If people are neither clear nor personally committed, little can be achieved. Building the perspectives and capacities of the staff on rights and gender issues is absolutely essential. Many trainings and workshops have been organised by AAI at all levels on gender, rights, power, but these trainings/workshops have by far not been enough.

A large number of people have not participated in any gender workshops. Many who had attended workshops and were good have left. Some people bemoaned the absence of briefings on gender during the induction of new people. I met many people in AAI who had never read the gender policy or the sexual harassment policy. In some Internet savvy offices, the new entrants are told to read policies on the Internet. No one checks what they read and what they leave out.

Not just the quantity but the quality of gender workshops/trainings needs to be seriously looked into. I say this because several people who had attended gender workshops were not able to define what is gender. Also, in one country programme a senior woman who was earlier handling gender told me, that after she had been given a five day gender training she was asked to train/sensitise others in the office. Being a serious and conscientious person she found this to be wrong and later gave up her gender responsibility. Instant gender trainers are found in plenty in the development world. After one short TOT on gender you can become a gender expert and a trainer. No one will hire an accountant, a researcher, a manager without that person having several years of training. But for gender a few days or weeks of training are enough. (And, on the other side are people like me who find gender to be so vast and complex that even after 25 years of work on it I cringe when some one calls me a gender expert). This way of handling gender only devalues it and makes it laughable. Imagine the plight of people being trained by instant gender trainers. And imagine what they think of and say after these trainings. I find conducting gender workshops/trainings to be the most difficult, sensitive and challenging, because one has to deal with deeply entrenched feelings, emotions, attitudes and behaviour; one has to handle religion and culture; one has to handle one's own biases and emotions, including anger. How instant gender trainers can be produced and accepted is beyond my comprehension.

The result of inadequate training, discussion and reflection is the lack of shared understanding and perspectives on gender. People have their own views, which are often conflicting with the views of others. Divergence of views means lack of shared vision, commitment and drive. All this does not make for good teams pulling in the same direction. Collaboration with these organisations could be mutually beneficial.

### **3.14 Identification and/or Creation of Good Gender Trainers**

Good gender trainers with a feminist, rights and pluralistic perspective are as rare as they are needed. It will be useful to identify them and work with them to create solid learning opportunities on gender for potential trainers and others. This work could be done at the Regional (international ) level.

In fact AAI, could think of setting up or supporting regional training facilities to meet the demand for good gender trainings. In Africa FEMNET and ISIS-WICCE are apparently doing some good capacity building work. In South Asia SANGAT (South Asian Network of Gender Activists and Trainers); Steps Towards Development, Dhaka; IWID, Chennai; Women and Media Collective, Colombo; Shtrii Shakti, Nepal are doing good capacity building work.

### **3.14 Dearth of Good Educational Materials on Gender**

Wherever I went, I asked to see educational materials being used to help people understand gender, rights, power etc. In most places I drew a blank. In one country programme, a Gender Coordinator had put some reading together from the Oxfam Gender Manual, UNDP documents etc. and was using it. This was good. But on the whole there is a dearth of educational materials for field level staff which are interesting, attractively produced, written in simple language and style. Because field people have little time and sometimes no culture and facility to read, it is necessary that these materials are interesting. I actually advocate that set of basic documents on gender, rights etc be given to everyone in an organization. Keeping documents in a library is good for the long life of books but then they remain unread. Spending money on making educational material available to AAI staff and to its partners, is good and normally a very profitable investment.

### **3.15 Gender Work With Communities Good but its Not Challenging Structures of Inequality**

Even without much clarity on gender and rights, a lot has been achieved at the community level. These achievements, however, are largely first level gender and rights achievements. This has been stated by most reviews of so called gender programmes, which in reality are basically women's programmes. Most of these programmes are providing micro credit for income generation activities. In most cases these activities are providing very little income for the work done by women. It seems most people, including women themselves think "peanut" profits are good enough for women. Women's time and labour is seen as hugely elastic and stretchable. Their time and labour are also perceived to be of little monetary value. So project managers think even if women get "peanuts", it is good enough for them. "At least they are getting something. If they were just sitting at home they would not even have this much." Something is always better than nothing for women. Few people try hard enough to go beyond "something" for women.

Most of the income generation activities women are doing are traditional and thus gender neutral. Hence, they neither give much income nor challenge the existing gender division of labour or roles. Already over 20 years ago NGOs in Bangladesh and India (I apologise for my Asia focus) had done innovative work of encouraging women to do activities which are sometimes called "gender benders" or gender transformative activities. Women were trained as carpenters, welders, paramedics and paravets. These were non-traditional activities, hence they increased women's choices by challenging existing division of labour and they also generated more income. I didn't hear of many "gender-benders" in AAI.

Other projects deal with providing basic needs like water, food, education. Here too I did not see much discussion on gender division of labour in the projects I visited. For how much longer will water be seen as women's need and responsibility? Don't boys and men use water or eat food cooked with water? Why should fetching water remain largely women's responsibility? Fetching water is back breaking and unending. Nowhere did I hear the need to challenge the present, highly unfair, exploitative, burdensome division of work and roles.

In most water projects (not just in AAI) the work of mechanics, which is normally paid, is given to men. Why? Women can easily be trained to become mechanics. This will not only give them jobs but also recognition. It will transform gender division of labour. What I saw in most places was perpetuation of patriarchal gender division of labour, traditional roles and activities of women, men, girls and boys.

In order to go beyond meeting basic needs and organising people, the next level issues need to be understood and tackled. These issues are looking at structures and relationships of power between men and women, rich and poor, majority and minority groups, urban, rural, government servants – people, etc. This requires deeper understanding of concepts and issues related to gender, rights, power and power relationships, gender division of labour, rewards, resources, decision making etc. In order to do this, good quality workshops, collective learning sessions, reflections, readings are required. Plus one requires skills for conflict transformation, strategic thinking and planning. Challenging the status quo is much more difficult and risky than providing services or organising people to obtain services and resources.

One did not see much on gender in programmes like agriculture, irrigation, livestock etc. There the urgency seems to be to get on with work and not get diverted by gender or women. Even in countries where very large numbers of women are farmers (e.g. Vietnam), women are being ghettoised in saving and credit groups and not integrated into irrigation, livestock or other bigger projects. This is regressive gender intervention caused by the gender backwardness of middle class people, who consider women to be mainly housewives and deserving only of “micro credit” and “peanut” profits.

### **3.16 Gender Concerns Missing in Many Campaigns**

Gender concerns are not yet adequately integrated in some campaigns of AAI, like the Food Rights Campaign, the Sugar and Cashew Campaign in Kenya. The Research and Policy Division have not always had a person to look at and incorporate gender concerns.

My feeling is (I have not had the time to study all the documents) that even in the educational campaign, the most successful of AAI campaigns, the talk is mainly of enrolment of girls and not of gender. If one is concerned about gender equity and equality in education, then it is not enough just to see that girls also go to school. One has to look also at the contents of education from a gender perspective. Is the education being provided ideologically domesticating women further or is it liberating and empowering them? There are ample examples from other educational efforts where the contents were full of patriarchal biases. They were putting women into subordinate positions and stereotypical roles. Then there are the questions of violence against girls, violence by men (teachers) and boys; attitudes, behaviour, dresses of girls, boys, men and women teachers; the responsibility of household work and looking after younger siblings. All these questions need to be discussed and actions taken to challenge inequalities.

### **3.17 Need for Closer collaboration within AAI**

To achieve synergies, closer links could be established within AAI, between people and programmes on gender, human rights and HIV/AIDS. The values, principles, issues perspectives can all be shared, much more than seem to be the case.

Perspective sharing and collaboration between gender people and HR/OD people could be much stronger. For this to happen HR/OD people could develop deeper understanding and appreciation of gender issues.

Of course there is also need for closer collaboration between gender and all campaigns.

However, the problem at the moment is the lack or complete inadequacy of dedicated gender staff. There is hardly any one working on gender, and those working on it, are completely overworked. The routine

activities themselves take away most of the time of the “one person gender bands”. There is no time and energy with them to produce good music and enough music to flow also into other work and campaigns. In the end, it is all coming down to more staff. Wouldn't it be wonderful if Azione Donna in Italy could collect huge funds to support more staff to work on gender and other offices of AA in Europe could start similar actions for women's rights!

### **3.18 Partnership With Organisations and Women's Movement**

AAI has established mutually beneficial relationships with many women's organisations which are part of the women's movement. This however is not yet happening everywhere. For example, In India there is not much interaction between AAI and feminist groups especially at the district and state level where AAI is operating.

Instead of starting its own activities and networks on sexual harassment, trafficking, FGM, Violence against women and girls, (VAWG), AAI could strengthen ongoing or potential networks of women's organisations.

In Kenya two women from two well established women's organisations said AAI is not known as a women's rights group. It is known more as someone working on basic services. Also within AAI there is no known feminist face. This I think is the case also in many other countries. No one can be an expert on everything. On gender issues AAI should not have any hesitation in being a junior, supportive, learning partner vis-à-vis other organisations who have been in feminist struggles for longer.

### **3.19 Need for Strengthened Regional and International Cooperation**

Using the advantage of being an international organisation, AAI could support and/or initiate regional and international cooperation and campaigns, like it did in Asia on trafficking. Every region has existing networks whom AAI could partner with. In Asia, for example there are Asian Women's Human Rights Coalition (AWHRC), Women's Initiative for Peace in South Asia (WIPSA), South Asian Network of Gender Activists and Trainers (SANGAT), South Asian Network of Food Ecology and Culture (SANFEC). In Africa there are FEMNET, ISIS WICCE and many more. At the global level there are organizations like ISIS International, Women Living Under Muslim Laws (WLMUL).

## **4. A Final Plea to Give Gender Its Due Place in AAI: RIGHT IN THE CENTRE**

### ***“One Hundred Women Are Not Worth a Single Testicle”- a Vietnamese Proverb***

Can anything be more insulting to women than proverbs like this one which I heard during my recent visit to Vietnam? What is more horrifying is the fact that this is not the only insulting proverb and Vietnam is not the only country where such proverbs exist. There are local versions of such global patriarchal insults. This is the case when every bearer of testicles has come to this world through women. Just imagine the plight of women if this was not the case.

Vietnam is one of the few countries which took patriarchy head on. President Ho Chi Minh's analysis of patriarchy was sharp and his pronouncements against it, clear. Almost 70 years ago, he stated that women in Vietnam were imprisoned *by the three “cangues” or neck chains, namely Confucianism, Colonialism and Patriarchy.* He stated, “ *What equality really means is a thorough going and difficult revolution*

*because contempt for women dates back thousands of years... If this large scale revolution is to be successful, progress will have to be made in every field: political, economic, cultural and legal.*” In 1930, the Vietnamese Communist party was established under the leadership of Ho Chi Minh. In the same year, the party established the Women’s Emancipation Association (later renamed the Vietnam Women’s Union), making it the world’s longest running national machinery for women.

The Communist party and the government of Vietnam have taken many steps to change the position of women. In spite of all the progressive legislation, programmes and funding for women’s empowerment, gender inequalities persist.

This is what a recent article (June 2004) entitled “Gender Norms, Gender Roles and HIV/AIDS in Vietnam”, given to me by the gender coordinator of AA Vietnam, has to say on the persistence of gender inequalities in Vietnam.

*“Traditional value of a Vietnamese woman depends on these four qualities- hard working, good looking, soft speaking and virtuous. Chastity is considered very important for a woman. Socialist politics has granted equal rights to women in all aspects of social life but the government and society still strongly support the maintenance of traditional values, including those attributed to women. In addition, Confucian’s “three obeys” for women (obey her father before marriage, her husband during marriage and her eldest son if she is a widow) are still influencing gender roles.*

*“These norms and values are putting women in subordinate position in relation to men. In the past a married woman was always to be called by her husband’s name and then her son’s name. In today’s language, a woman should call her husband anh-or big brother to show respect and to obey. Although women are encouraged to participate equally in the labour market, social activities and political spheres, their roles as mothers and wives are still considered as the most important. These roles are promoted by the Women’s Union-the government supported mass organisation.*

*Vietnamese folk saying, “A successful man has five to seven wives, a good woman should have just one husband” reflects double norms for men and women.*

*The stereotyped masculinity of “successful man with 5 or 7 wives” encourages men to have multiple sexual partners. However, being subordinate to men, women should be passive in sexual relations. Young women are considered loose or promiscuous if they suggest condom use.*

*Also because of gender stereotypes, when a man is found with HIV-the virus linked with indulgent behaviours, family and community are not always surprised or angry; but when a woman gets HIV it may cause terrible shock and anger. Stigma and discrimination towards women living with HIV is much greater than towards men.*

*When a person is sick with AIDS, women – mostly wives and mothers- are sole carers. In cases of married couples the wives are expected to forgive the HIV positive husband but husbands may abandon their wives if they are found with HIV. When a husband falls ill due to AIDS, his wife should look after him until his last day. When a wife has AIDS, her family, mostly her mother is her carer.*

*Women in many cases are blamed not only for their own behaviour but also for the behaviour of their husbands and children. It is women’s duty to look after the family, to satisfy and entertain their husbands so that are always happy; and to take care of their children but not to spoil them too much so that they always have proper behaviour.*

*Once HIV enters the family, reputation of the woman as a wife or a mother is ruined with the virus as the indication of her failure in her main duty. Her self-esteem and any power she has within the family and the community is also destroyed.*

*In summary gender norms and values in Vietnam have created unequal gender relations in HIV/AIDS. It is men who have “legitimacy” to get HIV and therefore to receive care and treatment. And it is women who have responsibility to provide care. HIV and gender stereotypes are also going hand in hand with one exacerbates the other”.*

This recent article has been quoted just to show **how entrenched patriarchy is** and what kinds of efforts are required to challenge it. **One should proclaim gender equality as a goal, only if one is serious.** If one is not serious or not able to make the required efforts why not let this objective be. Pronouncements not followed by genuine efforts only rub salt into patriarchal wounds of women and sensitive men.

#### **4.1 Patriarchal Virus Deadlier than HIV**

There seems to be little appreciation in AAI (and in most other development organizations) of the fact that the harm done by gender inequalities is no less “deadly” than for example, the harm done by HIV/AIDS or of the fact that the Patriarchal Virus can be deadlier for some than the HIV. More often than not women are poorer, more women are getting HIV and there are few people to take care of them. Millions of girls are violated and mutilated by FGM, 30 to 50% married women face domestic violence, and large numbers of women suffer sexual abuse and harassment within and outside families. In South Asia and China already 12 years ago “100 Million Women Were Missing”. Prof Amartya Sen wrote a paper with this title and showed how patriarchal violence was either killing or allowing girls/women to die. Without cultural neglect, indifference and violence, there should be 100 million more girls/women than boys/men in South Asia and China. In India alone 36 million women are “missing” (as against 4 million HIV cases) These are just a few examples and figures to show how much harm gender inequalities are doing to girls and women. And since girls and women reproduce future generations, the entire humankind is suffering as a result of gender related hierarchies, injustice and violence. Why is there no anger, no passion to challenge this pervasive gynocide/genocide? There was much more passion in the AA India work in Gujarat both during the earthquake and the massacre of Muslims.

In Ethiopia a considerable amount of work has been done by AAE to study and highlight the plight of some minority communities who are treated as untouchables by the majority community. One of the coordinators of an AAE CCDP is most passionate about it and he has put in a lot of thought, effort and resources to do policy advocacy on this issue. Others are supporting his efforts in AAE and the issue is getting visibility and attention.

I wondered why there was no senior man in AAE with a passion to fight FGM, which violates not just a few thousand people but half the population. Officially seventy percent of all Ethiopian girls are said to be subjected to FGM, but according to the Ethiopian Women Lawyers Association about 80 per cent girls suffer FGM. This means in Ethiopia alone about 26 million girls are mutilated and violated. And can there be a worse kind of human rights violation than cutting off the clitoris of girls or sewing up parts of their vaginas!! This would be equivalent to castration of men. Many organizations including AAI, are working on FGM. When FGM is mentioned by development people, it is called, “a harmful traditional practice leading to health and psychological problems”. Just a harmful practice!! Makes it sound quite harmless. I saw no analysis of FGM. I saw only descriptions. I kept asking whoever I met “What do families/people say why FGM is done?” Finally I got the following answers from the gender coordinator. She said mothers and others say FGM is done -

“To take away the heat from girls”

“To make girls cool and calm”

“Because un mutilated girls are restless. They break utensils”

“Because uncircumcised girls run away”

So here it is. FGM is done basically to destroy the sexuality and sexual urges of girls and women; to deny them the right to sexual pleasure; basically to control infidelity amongst girls/women and to satisfy men’s ego, their desire to control, to own, to “husband”. (the word husband means to control, to manage, to domesticate. Remember animal husbandry!!) FGM is just an extreme form of control. And if foolproof control mechanism requires mutilation of millions, so be it. And since it is only women who are being mutilated, no heads roll, no governments fall, no sanctions or wars are ordered. At best, some statements made, some committees formed. The biggest injustice is to call FGM, circumcision! (I hope you can see that I **am** getting upset and emotional AND I am NOT apologetic. I wish a few more wo/men in positions of power would get upset and emotional and champion FPT, i.e. fighting patriarchy together. ) Why is analysis missing in NGO project proposals on FGM?

Is it difficult to openly ask and understand what is behind FGM? Extreme fear of women’s sexuality? A sense of inadequacy or inferiority amongst men in the presence of women’s sexuality and their power to reproduce? A sense of anxiety? Every woman knows who her children are. No man can be 100 per cent sure. **Therefore the FGMs, the chastity belts, the walls, the burquas, the violence or the threat of violence in different parts of the world.** FGM is therefore not unique. Its universal. The desire to control women’s sexuality is behind practices not just like these, but also behind early marriage, restricted mobility of women, not sending girls to school, not allowing them in public spaces, not allowing them to take up jobs which involve travel etc. So basically **patriarchy deprives women of all their rights, including the right to participate in public life as citizens.**

Whatever I was shown and told about AAIs work on FGM in AA Ethiopia, or Kenya lacks a clear and sharp perspective and passionate champions, specially senior men. Why? Why no angry, passionate champions against FGM in spite of the fact that this must be or must have been happening to girls within the families of some of the staff? (The two people I spoke to, said yes, it happened in their families).

Is it because it is too close to the skin? It would require examining things within our homes? It would upset the cultural and /or religious mafia who seem to thrive on putting women down? And all religions do this to women. A lot has been written by feminists on the patriarchal nature of Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, and Buddhism.

Since gender has been recognized as a central issue in FPT, all these questions need to be asked and answered. If after the discussions the honest answer is “We shouldn’t or can’t do much on such cultural/religious issues” it could be acceptable. But not even to ask real questions, is surely not acceptable, is it?

Because of the above reasons gender work merits more serious thought, more resources and many more campaigns. Getting women involved in projects is very good and very necessary as the first step, but this is not enough to challenge patriarchal thinking and structures and to transform gender relations. Projects of the kind going on will get women some basic education, a little “micro” credit and profit, some cleaner water; but they will not get her equality, dignity, rights. For that structural changes are required. And structures are deeply entrenched.

## **4.2 FPT Should Continue, BUT With One More “P” In It?**

AAI is asking the question if FPT should continue in the next phase? Everyone in the TS2 team felt it definitely should. It has taken time for FPT to find its feet. People are just getting a grip of RBA, gender

perspective, partnerships, and campaigns. And also, poverty, gender inequalities, abuses of rights are all still there, with the same vehemence and ugliness. Therefore the goals and principles of FPT need to be reaffirmed, restated, may be reformulated but NOT given up. Consolidation of the work being done on FPT is what is required and NOT finding some new objective or slogan in place of FPT.

FPT must continue but with an additional “P” in it, another P for Patriarchy. Here is the explanation for the need for an extra P.

The majority of the world’s poor are women... women are the most exploited, oppressed and excluded amongst the exploited, oppressed and excluded communities. Women are at the bottom of all social, cultural economic, political pyramids. Women’s human rights are the least respected and protected. The reason for women’s additional subordination is patriarchy. As stated earlier, in addition to suffering from caste, class, race, neo-imperialist exploitation, women suffer from patriarchal domination. All societal institutions like family, religion; educational, legal, economic, political institutions, NGOs, etc. are patriarchal in nature. They are all dominated by men. Even families may not be safe and respectful of rights, dignity and autonomy of girls and women.

Fighting poverty and the processes of impoverishment, therefore requires fighting patriarchy also. Women can come in to their own, be recognized and honored for their reproductive and productive work which keeps the human race going, only if patriarchy is challenged. It is patriarchal controls and biases which deny women equality, mobility, opportunities, and participation in public life and development processes. Empowering women means challenging patriarchy and other systems of domination and exploitation like caste, class, race, and ethnicity, North-South. For women who are the majority of the poor, fighting poverty requires fighting patriarchy. There is now enough evidence from the field to show women may remain poor or property less even in well off families, women may remain undernourished even in food surplus families, women may get abused in all kinds of families in all countries of the North and South.

Patriarchy is global. Only its face, shape and the extent of its control changes. In the name of patriarchal religions millions of women were killed in European witch-hunts; in the name of patriarchal notions of beauty, the feet of millions of girls were bound in China. In present day USA, in the name of beauty (external skin deep) millions of young girls are anorexic, millions of older women are undergoing surgeries to increase or decrease the size of their breasts, to remove natural wrinkles, to remove fat from the body. In the name of patriarchal culture or religious practices millions of girls suffer the mutilation of their genitals. In the name of patriarchal honor women are killed in South Asia (There is no dishonor in killing women). In order to have government prescribed small family norms, millions of girls and female fetuses are being killed in India and China. Millions every year. This is the extreme violence of patriarchy affecting and even killing millions.

FPT has rightly recognized the need to challenge gender inequalities and inequities. Although the FPT document does not use the word patriarchy, it does talk of the same thing in terms of “power of men over women” and “subordination of girls and women.” Gender equity is a major and cross cutting objective of FPT.

This being the case FPT should not just be Fighting Poverty Together. FPT should actually be FPPT or FP2T viz. Fighting Poverty and Patriarchy Together. Renaming the policy FPPT will put women’s concerns squarely in the centre and remove or at least reduce the chances of gender concerns being forgotten and marginalized.

Introducing the word patriarchy into AAI lexicon will help sharpen the analysis. Calling a spade a spade will reduce ambiguities and encourage people to take sides. People have to decide on whose side they are,

on the side of patriarchy or on the side of equality. (No, matriarchy is not the opposite of patriarchy. It is the same thing- a disease like patriarchy, hence to be rejected. The opposite of patriarchy is the principle, value and reality of equality and equity between men and women, girls and boys.)

### 4.3 What About Making Gender a Hub of All AAI Activities?

Because most concerns of AAI can be addressed through gender work, gender can be an effective hub of all AAI activities. Let me expand a bit on how focussing on gender equality and women's empowerment can achieve many AAI objectives.

- Amongst the impoverished, marginalised and excluded communities, **women are the most impoverished, marginalised and excluded**
- Women's **human rights** are the most trampled upon, ignored and /or dishonoured. It was almost after half a century of the Universal Human Rights Declaration and through the efforts of the global women's movement, that global community accepted women's rights as human rights.
- Patriarchy is perhaps the oldest and the most entrenched of **social hierarchies** and it affects more than 50 percent of the human race. Challenging patriarchy will unleash the potential and energies of millions of girls and women who are the majority of the poor, towards sustainable and just development.
- Since women continue to handle the most **basic needs** in most communities, removing gender inequalities by empowering women will enhance the satisfaction of basic needs. Creatively involvement of women in the Food Right Campaign will strengthen the campaign.
- As in most rural communities women are the carers and **health givers**, recognition and affirmation of women's health related knowledge and skills and women's empowerment will lead to improved health of communities.
- Because of historical, socio-cultural reasons (not biological reasons) women cause less wars and conflicts. The women's movement has also been the most vocal on peace issues. Empowerment of women will therefore, also mean **more peace, less wars**.
- Family is the primary and most important institution for socialising future generations. Patriarchal families socialise children in patriarchal ways which devalue, demean and disempower girls and women; which dehumanise men by making them undemocratic, domineering, self centred etc. Families make children internalise notions and practice of gender (as also caste, class, race), inequality, injustice, unequal power distribution, and undemocratic ways of functioning. Systematic work on gender will slowly dismantle the most basic, pervasive and damaging of **power hierarchies**.
- Analysing, understanding and tackling gender based **power relations** will build the capacities of AAI staff to deal with other power hierarchies within and outside AAI.
- As gender touches all human beings, systematic and meaningful work on gender can initiate a **process of reflection and change** within every staff member and every partner from there the spiral can move upwards and outwards.

Because of all the above reasons, I feel, making gender concerns truly central in AAI will help achieve FPT. This could be the direction and the way to go for AAI in the next phase of its work.

## Appendix 1

## **Notes From the Field Visits: Some Glimpses of AAI's Work with Women and Girls in ActionAid Kenya**

### **A Visit to Sauti Ya Wanawake (Voice of Women)**

Sixteen women from three Sauties had come for the meeting, which took place in the small office of a CBO. Their style of introducing themselves floored and energised me completely. Every member would start with the slogan which translates into "Women are you awake?" the whole group shouted back "Yes, we are awake". This slogan really kept us awake and involved.

From their introductions, I gathered that all of them were economically active. Some were active before the formation of the Sauti and some got encouragement and support after the formation. Several are charcoal vendors, one runs a vegetable kiosk, some are health workers, some sell contraceptives, one is a dressmaker. Some women are Muslims, some Christians and they were all articulate and keen to move forward.

They spoke of their problems, solutions, failures and dreams. They did not spare men, not even religious leaders, courts, and government officers.

In a short time of three years Sauti has grown from one group of 16 women to four groups of over 1500 women and today they are a force to reckon with.

Sauti has taken a decision not to get involved itself, with any service delivery or income generation activities. As they are all also members of CBOs and/or self help groups, they do basic needs related projects outside of Sauti.

Sauti concentrates on rights, campaigns, networks, and advocacy on all issues related to women, including HIV/AIDS. Their voice (Sauti) has been becoming louder and clearer.

Action Aid has supported these women through capacity building in various areas such as counselling, gender, leadership, bookkeeping, project management, advocacy and civic education. This has built their self-confidence and they are now challenging leadership, both at the CBO and community level. With the advocacy skills received, these women are now taking on cases of child abuse, as well as violation of the rights of women in the community. In the last general election, 7 women presented themselves for civic positions and two went through to the preliminary level. This was a great achievement for them. It has helped reaffirm their self worth and has raised awareness of the community regarding the leadership potential of women.

I was told that Sauties have now established linkages with other actors. They are linking with FIDA, Coalition on Violence Against Women, Kenya Alliance for the Advancement of the Rights of the Child (KAARC), and KITUO CHA SHERIA, a legal aid organization. These organizations provide technical support for the women in dealing with issues brought to them. They are also working closely with government departments such as children's

Department, the local schools and the local administration. Because of the work that the women are doing, they have gained recognition in the community and with the local administration who now look up to them in dealing with community issues. These women have opened offices in Likoni, Kisauni and

Mtongwe where they volunteer their time as well as refer cases to other organizations and government departments for action.

The women's forum is now dealing with many issues, namely:

- Advocacy on rights of women and children
- Addressing violence against women and children
- Disseminating the children's act
- Encouraging education as a right
- Providing basic counselling to members of the community
- Are involved in awareness creation on HIV/AIDS
- Solicit leadership support
- Challenging the current status of women at the community level with particular focus on their involvement in development
- Advocacy against negative cultural practices and attitudes such as early marriage and FGM

### **Fighting Violence Against Women is Also Fighting Poverty in Kenya**

Like everywhere else in the world, violence against women and girls in Kenya is rampant. It is present in different forms (rape, incest, domestic violence, Sexual harassment a place of work, female genital mutilation). Enforced poverty on women is the economic face of violence against women and girls (VAWG). VAWG reduces women's opportunities in education and self growth, reduces their participation in public fora. By crippling the growth of over 50 per cent Kenyan population, it cripples the entire nation.

According to the Federation of Women Lawyers (FIDA Kenya) in Kenya there is evidence that the youngest victim of rape was a two year old child, while the oldest was a 78 year old woman. According tot FIDA, with rising levels of poverty, incidence of rape has increased in the urban areas. Marital rape has become a hotly debated issue in Kenya. A survey on VAW done by FIDA Kenya shows very high incidence of domestic violence mainly by husbands. VAW during pregnancy was also reported to be high.

It has been well established and argued by now that

- a. VAW is a development issue and
- b. Gender equality and women's equal participation is essential for fighting poverty

It was gratifying to see the work AA Kenya is doing on VAWG. This issue is brought up and dealt with in all the women's groups and girls fora. It is also dealt with very innovatively and courageously in Stepping Stones, the consciousness raising strategy developed by Action Aid to fight HIV/AIDS.

Women's fora in the Coast region have taken up several cases of rape, domestic violence and other forms of VAW. They have started a Black Ribbon Campaign against VAWG.

In the Northern Region AAK is challenging Female Genital Mutilation through its partners.

In the Coast Region the girls fora in government schools are slowly taking root and violence against girls is one of their main activities. Starting an open dialogue on gender based violence itself is a big step.

The CBOS, NGOs and AAK have started a dialogue with Muslim and Christian religious leaders on these issues. If this dialogue can be deepened and broadened and if religious leaders take on the challenge to wipe out VAWG, it will be a big step forward towards gender equality and the realisation of FPT.

The partners of AAK have also begun to involve and address boys and men in their activities against VAWG. The theme of the International Women's Day 2004 in the Coast Region was "Involvement of Boys and Men in Fighting Gender Inequality". This is a timely and important initiative which needs to be strengthened and multiplied

### **A Legal Clinic on Gender Issues in Mombassa Region**

Work against VAW in this region is now multi faceted. Women's groups are becoming active. In May 2004 a team consisting of a judge, lawyers, police officers went to a cluster of four villages to hold a day long legal clinic. They emphasized that statutory law is over and above customary law; hence cases of rape and other forms of violence against girls can no longer go unpunished. On this occasion, people were asked to bring cases for immediate hearing and judgement. Several people were given punishment for crimes committed by them. This collaborative effort was a very empowering experience for women's groups and CBOs.

### **From Despair to Hope: A Safe Haven for Violated Girls in Waa Primary School in the Coast Region**

I visited Waa primary school where 19 girls between 11 and 18, who were rescued from extreme violence, are being rehabilitated. Some of these girls were married off for bride price to older men and they were in very abusive relationships. Some girls were repeatedly raped by their fathers. One was repeatedly raped by her brother. They were rescued by school teachers, neighbours or members of the Girls Forum.

Five of these girls were pregnant and they were helped to deliver their kids. Their children are either with their mothers or in orphanages.

These girls are now integrated in the primary school and in its hostel. In addition they receive counselling and special training in computers and sewing. Several donors including AAK have given computers, TV, furniture, sewing machines, beds etc. for the rehabilitation and training of these girls.

The Community Action and Development Initiative (CADI) are supporting the rehabilitation and empowerment of the 19 survivors. Ms.Charo a very enthusiastic and competent person from CADI, who is also the Chair of the Coast NGO Council does counselling for the girls. AAK helped her get trained in counselling by Kenya Association of Professional Counsellors.

The presence of these survivors in the school is used to initiate an open discussion on violence against girls and other gender inequalities.

When we came to the school, the girls were waiting for us. I found them to be in good health and looking well. Sitting quietly on their chairs, they looked timid and sad, but I was amazed to see their zest, body language, energy when they began to sing and dance. Now their voices seemed to come from their stomachs. Their bodies and body movements were totally uninhibited. They sang songs on the burden of domestic work on girls and on the need for boys and men to share this work. Their energy was truly amazing and infectious.

My first reaction was - what a simple but innovative idea to make place for survivors of violence in residential schools rather than in remand homes, crisis centres or other such separate places.

The group of teachers, CBOs, NGOs and AAK who are involved with this initiative are conscious of the fact that boys and men have to be addressed and confronted. Their responsibility has to be pinned down. The communities have to be encouraged (or forced if women's fora become really strong) to deal with abusers and rapists also, in addition to rehabilitating the victims. The cause has also to be addressed.

In one area a CBO and AAK did a survey of girl pregnancies in schools and found that in eight cases the rapists were teachers themselves. These cases were sent to the education department. In just one case, where the teacher's crime could be proved, the man was punished. I was told it is not easy to get men teachers punished because the teachers union is dominated by men and in such cases men tend to support each other.

What next for these girls and for this initiative is the main question the people involved with this initiative are asking. How to ensure that they can be economically independent? How to involve boys and men teachers to think of the responsibility of men who violate girls? How to strengthen the links between this initiative, communities and the women's fora? Asking the right questions and continuously asking questions is the beginning of finding solutions. I am sure some solutions will be found if the efforts persist, enlarge and expand. A long way to go but the journey has begun...

## **Appendix 2**

### **A Roller Coaster Ride Called TS2 – reflections on the process.**

The first time I was dragged on a roller coaster was in 1970. I did not enjoy that at all. In fact, I hated it.

TS2 has been the second roller coaster ride of my life. I have enjoyed parts of it and just about survived other parts. It has been too rushed. Too much travel packed into too few days and still too little time to establish an informal, trusting relationship, to have a dialogue, to get real insights. In Kenya I travelled three hours one way and got to spend only 90 minutes in a DI. Twelve women and men from the local community and the DI staff were waiting for us. I had less than six minutes for each person. In India I travelled for two nights in a train and six hours by road and got to spend one hour with the project team and less than that with a women's group in a Musahar community. Except for one DI in Ethiopia, where I had enough time at least with the DI staff, everywhere else there was no time to go deeper into anything. In UK, I had 21 meetings in three days, none longer than 45 minutes, to hear and understand the work of whole sections. It was unsatisfactory and even frustrating.

The travel schedule was too hectic and it was followed by back-to-back meetings and visits, often starting minutes after we arrived after a nightlong flight or train travel. I have no idea how such planning could have been done. Super human physical, mental and emotional strength was being expected from the team. One can cope with such schedules for a few days but not for 15-20 days at a stretch. On several occasions one felt certain field visits could be better organised. Over tired, overstretched and mismanaged reviewers are really no good for anyone.

I think all of us and AAI were lucky that none of us fell seriously ill. As to minor ailments, every team member had her/his share. I managed to cope with my ENT infection for several days during the last leg of my marathon, but this infection flared up as soon as I got back home. I was forced to take a ten day course of antibiotics to be fit soon to travel again in India and to Vietnam.

The overdose of AAI often led to mental blockages. There were moments when the body and the mind refused to take in any more. To keep going required a lot of effort. The intake on these occasions was slow and uninspired.

TS2 took me to AA central offices in London, Nairobi, Addis Ababa, Milan, Delhi and Hanoi. It took me to regional offices in Mombassa and Lucknow, a CCDP office in Yem in Ethiopia a DA in Ha Tinh province in Vietnam, a Musahar Development project in UP, India. TS2 took me to working class urban areas in Mombassa, primary schools in coastal Kenya, to rural areas in UP, India, Southern Ethiopia and Vietnam. I interacted with men and women trying to put FPT into practice. The main and longer discussions took place while traveling with AA staff. During some of the longer travels I had the opportunity to go beyond talking about AA. I was able to learn about local cultures and customs.

I stayed in pretty fancy hotels in London and in less fancy hotels in Milan, Nairobi, Addis Ababa and Hanoi. Several nights were spent in aircrafts and trains. My most satisfying stay for two nights was in a simple CCDP office in Yem, Ethiopia. The office is built in local style. The CCDP team participated in its construction. Like in other homes, water is carried and brought from a distance on a donkey. In two days I used as much water as many waste each time they want to get to hot water or as much as they use in two pulls/pushes of the flush. With half a bucket of water each day I felt clean physically and cleaner morally. The star studded clear nights and the smell and taste of Ethiopian coffee (the best coffee I have ever had) were bonuses.

I spent time (always too short) with a girls forum, a group of women teachers engaged with girls fora, group of men fighting the menace of tse tse flies destroying their animals, a group of women learning and producing crafts, a group of women called voice of women working for women's dignity and empowerment, a group of women and men in a DI in Kenya working in an integrated way to improve the life of the community. I met members of a most deprived and excluded community of Musahars in UP struggling to improve their economic and social life, a group of street children in a drop-in centre in Lucknow India. In Vietnam I met a women's savings and credit group, an interfamily cluster, visited homes to see a women's piggery project, a water filter installed by a family. I saw a largish irrigation scheme constructed by people with the support of AA and the local government.

I spoke to student volunteers and young professionals devoting some of their time to campaigns initiated by AAI or organizing local AAI units in the UK and Italy and many more.

I met dozens and all kinds of partners of AA in different countries. These were CBOs, NGOs, networks of NGOs and CBOs and other organizations working on issues like education, child rights, food, HIV/AIDS, women's empowerment, human rights, governance etc. I met people from government departments, ministries, DFID, ADB and many more.

Although each one of the team members greedily collected and carried kilos of documents, there was no time to read most of them. Most of the reading about CPs and DAs/DIs was done in flights or trains on our way to these places.

After the visits there was no time to return to some documents or to do a gender analysis of documents related to programmes, marketing, campaigns etc. For me the last visit to a CP finished on June 19. I returned to Delhi on 21<sup>st</sup> night. The deadline fixed to send my report to the TS2 Team Leader was June 25. In the design of the TS2 programme, there were eight days for reading, digesting, reflecting on and writing the report. In actual practice the eight days were down to five. At least for someone like me the task was nerve wrecking, daunting and quite impossible.

When it came to writing the report, the mental and physical fatigue, the overdose of AAI and the deadline hanging on the head created mental blocks. It seemed all thoughts had dried up. There was no flow. It was just a question of pushing myself to produce something and send. This was really a shame because much better results would have been possible if there had been some more time. May be just a few days to relax, to recover, to refresh and only then get down to looking at the umpteen notebooks and other documents, framing our thoughts and producing something more useful and satisfying.

What we got during our travels to six countries were basically glimpses, just some flavour of the work in the field; some interaction with the staff at different levels. Nothing in-depth. We met

only those people with whom AAI had organised meetings for us. There was no time and opportunity to meet others who could have given a more critical, outsiders view.

I have put all this down so that next time such reviews can be organised differently and also for the readers to know the constraints in which everyone functioned.