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A Rights-Based Approach to Realizing the Economic and Social Rights of Poor and Marginalized Women

A Synthesis of Lessons Learned

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INTRODUCTION

Discussions among international donors and development agencies about how to reduce global poverty and increase overall well-being increasingly are focused on realizing human rights – a rights-based approach to development. Such an approach, in the words of the United Nations, “integrates the norms, standards and principles of the international human rights system into the plans, policies and processes of development.”¹ In this way, international development moves beyond a donor-client relationship of “givers” and “receivers” to one that is more balanced and embodies partnership. Development assistance programs that use this approach embrace goals of accountability, participation, transparency, empowerment and nondiscrimination.

A rights-based development approach is fairly new in the international development field. It is slowly gaining traction, but few program designers and implementers understand what comprises such an approach and how to use it.

To improve the international development community’s understanding of the value of a rights-based development approach, the International Center for Research on Women (ICRW), with funding from Ford Foundation (India), provided technical support to six projects in India from 2003–2005 to help identify both the process of and challenges involved in implementing this approach. Of the six projects, four included development interventions on realizing different human rights, including the right to education, food, livelihood and housing. The other two projects built on existing rights-based community interventions by providing analysis and documentation related to the rights-based development approach. Each project generated a report on their experience in implementing a rights-based approach.

The following report presents a conceptual and operational framework on the rights-based approach to development, with a particular emphasis on realizing the economic and social rights of poor and marginalized women and girls. This report is neither a static framework nor a blueprint. Rather, it provides guidelines and ideas that can be adapted and changed depending on the specific context of development projects and the capacities of people involved.

This report is organized into four sections. Section 1 presents the conceptual framework of a rights-based approach to development, with a focus on definitions. Section 2 outlines an operational framework, including the principles and strategies involved in implementation of a rights-based approach to development. Based on findings and observations from the six ICRW-supported projects (see box on p. 6), the researchers have distilled essential steps to realizing a human-rights approach. This section also discusses strategies for community involvement and multi-stakeholder participation.

Section 3 highlights the advantages of a rights-based approach to development and how to sustain its impact. Finally, Section 4 considers the challenges encountered during the course of project implementation, and looks ahead at how innovative development strategies can foster the realization of the rights of poor and marginalized people and communities.

¹United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. “What is a rights-based approach to development?” in Human Rights in Development, <http://www.unhchr.ch/development/approaches-04.html>, October 2005.

PROFILES OF THE ICRW-SUPPORTED PROJECTS

Project Title: *Rights-Based Development for Women: Moving from Theory to Action. An Empowerment Approach to Sustainable Livelihoods and Food Security*

Project Partners: Area Networking and Development Initiatives (ANANDI) and Tata Institute for Social Sciences (TISS)

Location: Rajkot and Panchamhaals and Dahod districts, Gujarat, India

Project Strategy: Reflection and documentation

Project Brief: This project involved reflection on ANANDI's work over the past decade, which involved empowering women to identify their needs, to implement interventions to improve livelihoods, and to lobby for services and programs to uphold their rights as both citizens and women. ANANDI's work emphasizes development interventions, the participation and ownership of stakeholders, and the synergy between the community and the implementing agency (ANANDI). The project document that came out of this reflection assesses the implications of using a rights-based approach that focuses on the processes of empowerment and change.

Rights Focus: **Rights to food security and livelihood**

Project Title: *Poor Women's Collective Action for the Justiciable Right to Food*

Project Partners: ThinkSoft Consultants and Ankuram Sangamam Poram (ASP)

Location: Mehaboobnagar and Medak districts, Andhra Pradesh

Project Strategy: Research and advocacy

Project Brief: This project was designed as a collaboration between Ankuram Sangamam Poram (ASP), a cooperative federation of Mutually Aided Cooperative Societies, and an autonomous union that works with dalit-bahujans. It highlighted the urgency of organizing and action around the issue of women's food security. In particular, the project addressed the challenge of transforming legal rights as stipulated by India's Supreme Court into concrete actions at the grassroots level. It also focused on the role of organizations of poor women, non-governmental organizations, civil society, the media, and other stakeholders in ensuring the right to food.

Rights Focus: **Right to food**

Project Title: *Girl child labor and unemployed women in hybrid cottonseed production*

Project Partners: Glocal Research and Consultancy Services and Sri Hanumantharaya Educational Charity Society (SHEC)

Location: Kurnool district, Andhra Pradesh, India

Project Strategy: Implementation and advocacy

Project Brief: This project focused on securing employment for adult women through the creation of a demonstration farm for cottonseed production. It advocated for an end to child labor and enabling girls to secure their internationally recognized right to education.

Rights Focus: **Rights to work, guaranteed employment, freedom from child labor and education**

Project Title: *From Research to Action: Implementing a rights-based, demand-driven model for girls' education*

Project Partners: Sri Bhubaneswari Mahila Ashram (SBMA) and Educate Girls Globally (EGG)

Location: Tehri Garhwal District, Uttaranchal, India

Project Strategy: Research and advocacy

Project Brief: The project identified the factors that prevent girls from accessing educational services, including insufficient infrastructure, gender-based discrimination, and a lack of parental and community investment in educating girls. It highlighted the need for government and civil society engagement to make education for girls a reality.

Rights Focus: **Rights to education and childhood**

Project Title: *Towards a Sexual Harassment-Free Workplace*

Project Partners: Sanhita Gender Resource Centre

Location: Kolkata, India

Project Strategy: Documentation

Project Brief: This project highlighted problems faced when advocating for the rights of women in cases of sexual harassment at the workplace. Project documentation included narratives by women workers on their experiences with employers and a legal system that, combined with an oppressive social structure, makes justice for women workers difficult to attain. The project also discussed the importance of using Supreme Court Guidelines on Sexual Harassment to help ensure a safe and secure workplace for women.

Rights Focus: **Rights to a safe and secure workplace and freedom from violence**

Project Title: *Single Women's Right to Housing*

Project Partners: Youth for Unity and Voluntary Action (YUVA) and International Center for Research on Women (ICRW)

Location: Mumbai, India

Project Strategy: Research and advocacy

Project Brief: In the context of the debate on women's property rights, this project highlights the need to realize the housing rights of single women, whose non-married status not only marginalizes them socially but also exacerbates their economic vulnerability.

Rights Focus: **Right to adequate housing**

SECTION I

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

I.1. Defining a rights-based approach to development

A human rights approach adds value because it provides a normative framework of obligations that has legal power to render governments accountable.

– Mary Robinson, World Summit on Sustainable Development, 2002

A rights-based approach to development explicitly focuses on the attainment of minimum conditions for living with dignity. To date, however, the international development community does not have a universal definition of or framework for the approach.

Academic and development-related literature defines a rights-based development approach in various ways, based in legal, socioeconomic or political perspectives. These definitions also are informed by the different national and international legal standards that recognize and promote human rights. This section explores the common elements across the varying academic and legal conceptual frameworks.

First, a rights-based approach to development is based on a framework of rights and obligations. The U.N. Development Program issued a “Statement of Common Understanding” in May 2003, explaining that “in a human rights-based approach, human rights determine the relationship between individuals and groups with valid claims (rights-holders) and State and non-state actors with correlative obligations (duty-bearers). It works towards strengthening the capacities of rights-holders to make their claims, and of duty-bearers to meet their obligations.”²

A group of development practitioners in South Asia flesh out this idea further: “A rights-based approach is founded on the conviction that each and every human being, by virtue of being human, is a holder of rights. A right entails an obligation on the part of the government to respect, promote, protect, and fulfill it. The legal and normative character of rights and the associated governmental obligations are based on international human rights treaties and other standards, as well as on human rights provisions in national constitutions. Thus, a rights-based approach involves not charity or simple economic development, but a process of enabling and empowering those not enjoying their ESC [economic, social and cultural] rights to claim their rights.”³

But putting these concepts into action in an international development context requires a clear distinction between “rights” and “needs.” As stated by the South Asian development practitioners, “A right is something to which I am entitled solely by virtue of being a person. It is that which enables me to live with dignity. Moreover, [it] entails an obligation on the part of the government. A need, on the other hand, is an aspiration that can be quite legitimate, but it is not necessarily associated with an obligation on the part of the government. ...satisfaction of a need cannot be enforced. Rights are associated with ‘being,’ whereas needs are associated with ‘having.’”⁴

Second, a rights-based approach should encompass the full range of indivisible, interdependent and interrelated rights (i.e., civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights). This in turn requires a framework that reflects internationally guaranteed rights, such as those related to health, education, housing, justice, personal security and political participation. By definition, such an approach would

² United Nations Development Programme. 2003. “The Human Rights Based Approach to Development: Towards a Common Understanding Among the UN Agencies.” New York: UNDP.

³ International Human Rights Internship Program and Asia Forum for Human Rights and Development. 2000. *Circle of Rights: Economic, Social and Cultural Rights Activism. A Training Resource*. Washington, DC: IHRIP.

⁴ International Human Rights Internship Program and Asia Forum for Human Rights and Development. 2000. *Circle of Rights: Economic, Social and Cultural Rights Activism. A Training Resource*. Washington, DC: IHRIP.

be incompatible with development policies, projects or activities that have the effect of violating rights. In other words, trade-offs between development and rights should never be made.⁵

Third, a rights-based approach focuses on raising levels of accountability and transparency in the development process by identifying rights-holders (and their claims) and corresponding duty-bearers (and their obligations). The approach thereby addresses both the “positive” obligations of duty-bearers (to recognize, respect, protect, promote and provide rights) and their “negative” obligations (to abstain from rights violations).⁶ A rights-based approach also provides for the development of adequate laws, policies, institutions, administrative procedures, practices and mechanisms for redress and accountability that can ensure the realization of entitlements and respond to the violation of rights. It calls for the “translation” of universal standards into locally determined benchmarks for measuring progress and enhancing accountability.⁷

A fourth critical feature of a rights-based approach is that it requires a high degree of participation. According to the U.N. Declaration on the Right to Development, such participation must be “active, free and meaningful.” In other words, mere formal or ceremonial contacts with beneficiaries is not sufficient. A rights-based approach emphasizes access for rights-holders to development processes, institutions, information and mechanisms for redress and complaints. In the context of development work, this means that the partners in and beneficiaries of development have access to a development project’s mechanisms. Rather than development agendas that pursue externally conceived “quick fixes” and imported technical models, the norm would be to adopt process-based development methodologies and techniques.⁸

The main objectives of a rights-based approach are to:

- Strengthen the understanding of rights, i.e., understanding the location, forms and perpetrators of rights violations; recognizing who is vulnerable and assessing degrees of vulnerability; and recognizing existing power imbalances in society;
- Ensure accountability and transparency by identifying rights-holders (and their entitlements) and corresponding duty-bearers (and their obligations);
- Build capacities for the realization of rights so that rights-holders can make claims and duty-bearers can meet their obligations;
- Facilitate the active and meaningful participation of multiple stakeholders, including people who directly benefit from projects through access to development processes and institutions, improved information, legal redress, and other positive strategies;
- Create a sense of ownership of development processes through strategies of empowerment that focus on rights-holders both directly and through their advocates and civil society organizations; and
- Encourage the expression of rights through different mediums of communication and interaction with people across regions.

Finally, a rights-based approach must give particular attention to issues of discrimination, equality, equity and vulnerability. This means that development efforts must engage vulnerable groups, such as women, minorities, indigenous peoples and prisoners. Because vulnerable populations vary by context, a rights-based approach requires program designers and other staff to consider local circumstances when identifying vulnerable populations. To do this, the development community needs data that is disaggregated (to the greatest degree possible) by race, religion, ethnicity, language, sex and other categories related to human rights.

⁵ United Nations Office of High Commissioner for Human Rights. “What is a Rights-based approach to development?” in Human Rights in Development, <http://www.unhcr.ch/development/approaches-04.html>, accessed October 2005.

⁶ Duty-bearers are not limited to states, but can also include individuals, local organizations and authorities, private companies, aid donors and international institutions.

⁷ In fact, with regard to all human rights, states must have both the political will and the means to ensure their realization and they must put in place the necessary legislative, administrative, and institutional mechanisms required to achieve them. Quoted in United Nations Office of High Commissioner for Human Rights. “What is a Rights-based approach to development?” in Human Rights in Development, <http://www.unhcr.ch/development/approaches-04.html> October 2005.

⁸ United Nations Office of High Commissioner for Human Rights. “What is a Rights-based approach to development?” in Human Rights in Development, <http://www.unhcr.ch/development/approaches-04.html>, October 2005

The discourse on human rights and development offers a significant advantage to those engaged in policy advocacy. By focusing on the rights of individuals and the obligation of states to uphold, respect, protect and ensure these rights, the rights-based approach draws its legitimacy both from an internationally acknowledged set of values and the legislation and policies of individual countries, as well as the commitment of these countries to international treaties and conventions. In this sense, a rights-based approach places the onus of realizing rights squarely on the state, which must meet its obligations to citizens and uphold commitments that it has made through formal legal instruments.⁹

Sensitive bureaucrats and policymakers often have responded to the notion of rights and duties in a democracy and acknowledged the claims of women and other groups in this context, but have not viewed rights as a matter of law. A rights-based approach therefore has a strategic appeal both for marginalized groups and policymakers.¹⁰ However, it is only when women and other marginalized groups assert their equality and demand their rights vis-à-vis the state that the state and its officials will take accountability seriously. From the perspective of realizing the economic and social rights of poor and marginalized women, pressure from below to assert rights is just as important as pressure from above in the form of rights that are enshrined by the state.

In sum, a rights-based approach to development explicitly focuses on the attainment of minimum conditions for living with dignity. In this way, the approach lays the groundwork for state accountability and action as well as citizen participation and transparency. The approach has gained credence in part because it focuses on entitlements in concrete terms and identifies who is responsible for ensuring access to these entitlements. By identifying who has entitlements and who does not, this approach exposes

From charity to rights-based development

With a few exceptions, a rights debate is absent within the development community. As a result, the process of using a human rights framework as a tool with which to negotiate power and cultural norms and to engage in a process of resistance is not reflected in today's development politics. In fact, there is an urgent need to shift the conceptual framework of development away from the concept of charity, toward demanding accountability from the state and the community.

Even though directives from the Supreme Court of India make it clear that the "right to food" can be considered a fundamental right, few activists have viewed it in this way. Even those in acute distress have not yet voiced the need for food security as a demand. As a result, steps to ameliorate hunger are generally seen as charitable acts, for example as a simple matter of "feeding the poor." The mindset that shapes even government food-for-work programs is colored by such perspectives, rather than by the urgent need to fulfill a justiciable right of the people.

A new discussion is needed in civil society to show that the attainment of food security does not rest on charity, but on recognition of the fundamental rights of people that should form the very basis for economic and social development.

The ThinkSoft-ASP project team, 2005

the roots of vulnerability and marginalization, expands the range of responses by the duty-bearers, and strengthens the ability of individuals and communities to act and negotiate to improve their conditions. The language of rights is a compelling, powerful force in social movements today and reflects the aspiration to achieve justice across widely different cultures, and political and economic situations.

⁹ ANANDI-TISS. 2005. Rights-Based Development for Women: Moving from Theory to Action. An engagement with an Empowerment Approach to Sustainable Livelihoods and Food Security

¹⁰ Ibid.

SECTION 2

STRATEGIC AND OPERATIONAL FRAMEWORK

This section provides a programmatic framework for implementing a rights-based approach to development, illustrated by experiences from the six projects. It starts by highlighting steps that can help ground a rights-based approach to development and then discusses strategies of implementation employed by the project teams.

2.1. Principles of implementation

Analysis of the six projects considered in this report reveals some common principles that should be applied when implementing a rights-based approach to development.

Define rights. A rights-based approach to development must first define the rights. This requires identifying the links of a specific right to other rights, considering appropriate interventions for those interlinked rights, and key issues for advocacy efforts. For example, in the Glocal/SHEC project, the team discovered that the right to education for girls was intrinsically connected to the right to livelihood for adult women. Unless a household had economic security, parents could not support education for their girls; and in many cases, economic security depends on the mother's employment.

A crucial step in defining rights in the implementation process is to unpack what the rights mean for the local community. The “unpacking” of a right means identifying cultural and social norms that can affect the realization of rights of particular groups or individuals. For example, the ThinkSoft/ASP project team found that a strong cultural reticence (even among the poor) to discuss food insecurity and hunger hindered acknowledgment that having sufficient food is a right. In the YUVA/ICRW project, the team addressed cultural bias against single women by working with community elders – key stakeholders in the community – to understand and address these norms. The team used information from the elders to shape interventions for garnering respect of single women's right to housing.

Unpacking a right also involves examining the right both from the right-holder's and duty-bearer's perspective, especially when considering how to uphold a right and for what purpose (e.g., whether to remedy a particular violation or to challenge the status quo). For example, the Sanhita project team's efforts to implement guidelines on sexual harassment at the workplace started with defining rights from a “woman's perspective” and a “worker's perspective.” As a result, related companies and organizations established a harassment policy and implementation process, including the formation of formal, proactive committees to hear and address complaints.

Identify a focus. To put a rights-based approach into practice, a choice must be made whether the protection, fulfillment or promotion of rights is at stake. Determining the focus of the approach helps improve the development project's impact by clarifying strategies needed for a specific context. That said, the focus can evolve through the life of the project.

For example, the ANANDI/TISS study explored ways that women experience vulnerability in the public and private spheres, and situations in which they feel confident to assert their rights. Its analysis found, as expected, that ANANDI's work on domestic violence and discrimination focuses on the protection of women's rights. Less obvious was the realization that its work on safe drinking water, fair wages and control also focuses on fulfilling women's rights. Moreover, ANANDI's efforts built on each other so that as women's understanding of their rights increased, their demand for more information and even greater protection of these rights also increased.

Acknowledge that rights are context-specific.

Whether working with women, children, the elderly, the disabled, youth or an entire community, a rights-based approach must adapt to the context in which the rights-holders live. Development interventions should be based on a “hierarchy of vulnerabilities” that

considers the interplay among gender, class, caste, age, religion, region and other factors.¹¹

For example, the YUVA/ICRW project team recognized the need to engage with social movements and campaigns as part of its response to changes in urban settlement policies and housing demolition in the city of Mumbai. The right to housing for single women had to be placed within the context of a broader struggle to realize the rights of poor and marginalized people, while still maintaining a focus on the particular vulnerabilities of single women.

Create transparency. A rights-based approach requires a shift from providing services to providing information. As such, access to qualitative and disaggregated data becomes important for prioritizing which rights violations should be targeted through interventions. Similarly, the buy-in and involvement of all stakeholders improves transparency, increasing the likelihood that any new information collected for the intervention will be rigorous and support the fulfillment of rights.

For example, the SBMA/EGG project team worked with officials at the Department of Education to form a joint committee to investigate girls' enrollment rates in Tehri Garhwal. This process led to greater openness to accepting the complexities of girls' enrollment and finding alternative solutions. However, this process also alienated some teachers who were held responsible for providing incorrect data. Transparency, then, is important, but also poses challenges.

The ThinkSoft/ASP team approached its goal of reducing hunger and food insecurity by seeking greater transparency and accountability from government programs. They identified the exclusion of eligible residents and inclusion of ineligible residents in the programs, determined food security and hunger levels among the bottom quintile of the population, and investigated deaths in the local community that potentially were due to hunger. This information spurred work with local officials to ensure that new criteria were developed to identify and prioritize the most vulnerable members of the community who needed food support.

Improve understanding of rights among duty-bearers and strengthen their capacities. The role of duty-bearers – often the governments – is critical to the success of a rights-based approach. The projects profiled in this report had various experiences with government's role as the protector of rights.

The Glocal/SHEC team indicated that the change in government in Andhra Pradesh during the course of the project made it difficult to implement a rights-based approach because the new government had less interest in the right to education or the elimination of child labor. In contrast, the ThinkSoft/ASP team reported having easier access to top leaders in the government and a good level of awareness of the right to food, thanks to a recently proclaimed national commitment to food security. Nonetheless, the project still struggled to engage government officials at the *mandal* (district) level in considering a rights-based framework for action. The SBMA/EGG project reported a similar experience and found government personnel and departments lacking in their commitment to realizing the right to education for girls.

The ANANDI/TISS team indicated that even though many government officials used the correct rhetoric regarding rights-based development, they lacked a firm understanding of what it entailed in terms of policy and program implementation. YUVA also faced a significant challenge while implementing its project, which coincided with large-scale housing evictions and demolitions in Mumbai and shifts in government policies on shelter for the poor and other marginalized groups. In the Sanhita project, the team recognized the need to build the capacity of government, employers and the judiciary to understand and implement rights, and tried to initiate such programs in tandem with advocacy and action efforts on sexual harassment in the workplace.

These experiences point to the need to include capacity-building strategies in rights-based approaches. Doing so should involve not only those whose rights are violated, but also those who are meant to protect and promote rights (i.e., duty-bearers such as government officials and the judiciary). Efforts to strengthen capacity among duty-bearers

¹¹ Kapur, A. 2004. *From Thought to Action: Building Strategies on Preventing Violence against Women*. New Delhi: KRITI team and OXFAM.

should focus not only on legal obligations to uphold rights, but also on fostering views that are sensitive to constructs of gender, class, caste, religion and age— aspects that are particularly significant to the rights of poor and marginalized women and children.

Hold stakeholders accountable for their responsibilities vis-à-vis the realization of rights.

In any rights-based development process, the roles of primary and secondary stakeholders¹² are central to the effective implementation of rights. Rights-holders need to work with their communities and the state to ensure that their rights are recognized, respected, protected, fulfilled and promoted.

The ThinkSoft/ASP team found that taking action on rights is not just a matter for the state, but that the communities themselves can redefine rights—a political-legal phenomenon that began to take shape in post-Mandal/Masjid India.¹³ When individuals come together as a community to seek justice, a powerful dynamic can arise. The ThinkSoft/ASP project formed coalitions of human rights groups, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and community-based organizations (CBOs) to redress rights violations and oversee food security in communities, while also advocating for freedom from hunger and the right to food.

Maintain multiple strategies and levels of action.

The partners involved in the ICRW-supported projects discovered that they often had to look beyond the specific project strategies and engage a broader range of stakeholders if their goals were to be met. Rights are interrelated and exist along a continuum; they cannot be fulfilled in isolation.

As a rights-based approach to development is operationalized, a broader range of responses is needed to address the increased awareness of rights that is likely to occur. Projects sought to achieve this by using

the media to engage a wider set of stakeholders (as in the Glocal/SHC project), developing strategies to foment broader social movements as the context of a project changes (YUVA/ICRW), working with communities to improve their ability to take responsibility for demanding fulfillment of their rights (ThinkSoft/ASP), engaging women and local organizations in mapping out a particular right and key emerging issues (ANANDI/TISS), and developing joint action plans with community and government officials (SBMA/EGG).

Bringing about real change in the lives of women requires empowerment processes that build on individual and collective strengths, a belief in the value of women’s own experiences, and motivation for women to negotiate with and (if necessary) confront power structures. For example, advocacy efforts at the state and national levels, such as food security campaigns, have been meaningful in places like Fangiya village, where women’s groups have closely monitored and led the struggle to make their right to food a reality.

A feminist redefinition of the rights-based approach

- Emphasize the social and not just the individual nature of rights, thus shifting the onus of correlative duties from individuals to public agencies.
- Acknowledge the communal and relational contexts in which individuals act to exercise or pursue their rights.
- Place rights at the forefront of efforts to fulfill human needs and redistribute resources.
- Recognize the bearers of rights with regard to self-defined, multiple identities, including gender, class, race and ethnicity.

The ANANDI-TISS project team, 2005

¹² The term “primary stakeholders” used here is what charity and other development approaches refer to as “beneficiaries” or “target community.” Secondary stakeholders include other members of the community and society who have a stake or could have a stake in protection and fulfillment of the primary stakeholders’ rights.

¹³ An important hallmark of India in the eighties and nineties was the growing assertion for justice by both traditional lower castes as well as fundamentalist Hindu groups. Traditional lower castes’ push for an increasing share in the system led to the Mandal Commission, which developed an elaborate quota system for educational institutions and in public sector enterprises. Masjid refers to the destruction of a historically important Moslem mosque supposedly built on a pre-existing temple at an ancient birth site of a popular Hindu god. The Hindu fundamentalists argued that their right to worship was denied by the existence of the mosque and destroyed the mosque in a public assertion of their right vis-a-vis of the Muslim community.

Equipping women with information is another effective strategy. The ANANDI project showed that when women were equipped with new information with respect to their right to food, they demanded and received improved delivery of basic services by the state, such as through the Public Distribution System (PDS). At the same time, simply providing information about rights and speaking the language of food entitlements has not been sufficient.

The YUVA project's organization of a collective of single women has gone hand-in-hand with efforts to encourage community leaders to respect the right of these women to housing and to motivate government officials and other advocates to fulfill their responsibility to provide housing.

Create an enabling process and context. Realizing rights is a process and not an end in itself. In the ANANDI project, the organization used women's daily problems related to water, fuel, fodder and food as the basis for forming common interest groups. It is by enabling women to analyze their problems in the context of social justice, supporting them in efforts to access government resources, and helping them to deal with local vested interests that they are able to realize their rights. In order to assess whether rights have been realized or not, it is therefore essential to monitor progress on the creation of such "enabling conditions."

As the project team concluded, "It is a common experience that when women seek justice and equity in accessing their basic rights to land, water, property, dignity, health care, etc., they often have a long struggle in front of them. They have to first negotiate power relations at the household and the community levels before they negotiate with the state. The women have to overcome fear, restrictions on their mobility, and other patriarchal norms that do not allow them to participate in any decision-making process at any level. They have to simultaneously reexamine the basis of social rights and renegotiate the relationships that have for so long been taken for granted by their families and communities and indeed by themselves, too. The lesson has been that in order for women to assert their rights with the state, or even in the

household and community, certain enabling conditions need to be created which allow them to participate in decision-making processes and influence the development discourse."¹⁴

2.2. Strategies to realize rights

A combination of different strategies is required to achieve the objectives of a rights-based approach to development and fulfill the various requirements of a development intervention.

This report highlights strategies that worked well for these six projects using a rights-based approach to development. In fact, these strategies are integral to development programming and make the articulation and protection of rights possible. It should be noted that while the strategies can be used alone or in combination with others at different times, the order in which they are presented below is a good general guideline for designing development programs that seek to integrate a rights-based approach.

Participatory action research. The ANANDI/TISS team based its participatory action research on its initial analysis of contextual and causative factors. This analysis then became the foundation of all project action strategies. In fact, the research established linkages among interventions as they evolved and came to be seen by women in the community as expressions of their rights. The research also helped women to identify the specific aspects of the rights that they were trying to protect, fulfill and promote.

Planning and design. The SBMA/EGG project created a demand-driven model for the education of girls. From the outset, the methodology involved the identification of duty-bearers and rights-holders. This model aimed to match the fulfillment of rights with field strategies designed to generate more demand for girls' education among children, parents and community leaders.

Organizing into collectives. The Glocal/SHEC project's strategy of forming women's self-help groups was a significant starting point to facilitate the articulation of rights and prioritize strategies to

¹⁴ Quoted in "Rights-Based Development for Women: Moving from Theory to Action. An engagement with an Empowerment Approach to Sustainable Livelihoods and Food Security," ANANDI-TISS (2005)

empower women. The project organized women around the issue of child labor and through the activity of cottonseed farming. A primary objective of the project was women's capacity building in advocacy and lobbying. Another was to facilitate women's groups to conduct seed production activities, thereby helping to dispel myths about the inability of adult women to work in cottonseed production and demonstrating new ways to create employment in the agricultural sector.

Direct interventions. While recognizing that there is a difference between needs and rights, the ThinkSoft/ASP project led to the design and implementation of an intervention that prioritized the fulfillment of needs over rights. The project determined that fulfillment of rights depends on the preparedness of the community to claim its rights, the capacity of duty-bearers to fulfill their responsibilities and the accessibility of legal instruments that make the right to food justiciable. Project interventions included a Food Watch Committee, established in a Narayanpet *mandal*, to monitor the pilot "Food Assurance Scheme" being implemented by the VELUGU project (a government saving and credit program based on a self-help group model); and a self-help group's establishment of a community kitchen in one of the villages to feed people once a day. The latter relied on local donations of cash, rice and other commodities. The list of deserving families included widows with children, women with chronically ill male partners and a large number of children, the elderly parents of men who had migrated to towns to work, and deserted, single and orphaned women with severe health problems.

Capacity building. Reflection and analysis were integral components of the Sanhita project's strategies. Efforts focused on building capacity to improve the ability of rights-holders (victims and/or survivors of sexual harassment in the workplace) to demand their right to work free of harassment; and to raise awareness among duty-bearers (employers in the private and public sectors, members of committees set up to hear complaints and the judiciary) of their role in upholding this right. This strategy was important to ensure that sexual harassment in the workplace was viewed by the women themselves, as well as both the harasser and the employer, as an act of violence against female workers.

Advocacy. The YUVA/ICRW project found that among the project's potential action strategies, advocacy stood out as one of the best for advancing women's rights in general and the right to housing in particular. This was largely due to the fact that YUVA already had extensive experience advocating on the issue of housing rights in general, one of several groups focusing on this. At the same time, they understood the specific needs of single women. They found that it was relatively easy to integrate the rights of single women to housing into the larger ongoing discourse.

Networking. Interaction and outreach both are integral to the success of a rights-based approach to development. Rights are not direct benefits that are provided at a given time, but are fulfilled as part of an ongoing process in which both rights-holders and duty-bearers, along with other stakeholders, act together. The Glocal/SHEC project showed that networking with other NGOs and social investment groups helped to address macro-level issues. For example, pressure from investors and NGOs forced the seed companies (in particular multinational companies) to pay serious attention to the problem of child labor and to agree to collaborate with local NGOs to address it. This joint effort compelled seed companies to develop a clear policy against child labor and to then communicate it to growers. In fact, seed companies announced incentives for the farmers who stopped using child labor and penalties for those who continued the practice, and also agreed to review this and other relevant policies. Syngenta, an active member in this joint initiative, organized a stakeholders meeting in June 2005, at which it and two other companies (Bayer and Emergent Genetics) agreed to raise by 5 percent the procurement price paid to farmers who do not use child labor.

Organizational development. The ANANDI/TISS study highlights the importance of organizational flexibility, which was key to strengthening women's empowerment as the project progressed. In this case, the articulation and fulfillment of rights among stakeholders guided the project's strategic planning, team building and resource generation. The outcomes of this project reflect the fact that the dynamic nature of a rights-based approach can affect an organization's vision, mission and management.

Communication and documentation. To ensure that a development process or intervention remains rooted in a framework of rights, it is important to continually generate new ideas and strategies and to learn from previous experiences. A rights-based approach provides an opportunity for a dynamic educational process—an advantage over development that is based solely on service delivery or charity. A critical strategy in this regard is the systematic, creative documentation of the rights in focus. Case studies from the Sanhita project show that for women subjected to sexual harassment, training materials and posters and leaflets on Supreme Court guidelines on sexual harassment in the workplace were effective communications tools. They helped victims to question violations of their rights, raised consciousness and formed the basis for action to protect and promote rights.

Monitoring and evaluation. As mentioned in Section 1, the key features of a rights-based approach to development include a clear understanding of rights, empowerment, participation, accountability, transparency, non-discrimination and attention to vulnerable groups. These aspects can be realized through both the implementation process and actual project results. Determining the extent to which this happens requires identification of indicators to assess outcomes of the processes that are initiated through development interventions. This may at first appear to be a subjective or purely qualitative view, but the six projects discussed in this report illustrate the importance of monitoring and evaluating both process and outcomes.

From the perspective of realizing the rights of poor and marginalized women and girls, key indicators linked to a rights-based approach to development will include the following:

- Recognition of vulnerability (e.g., class, caste, religion, age, sex or region).
- Differentiation between needs and rights when defining project objectives.
- Participation of stakeholders in determining interventions.
- Application of negotiation and conflict resolution skills.
- Articulation of and response to violations of rights.
- Organization as a collective to fulfill rights.
- Transparency in decision-making processes.
- Resistance against duty-bearers.
- Use of legal instruments that guarantee a particular right.
- Identification of gaps in legal instruments.

Other traditional indicators also should be used to assess project impact. In some of these projects, for example, indicators could include changes in efforts to improve livelihoods and economic conditions; changes in level of access to and control over natural resources; and the degree to which a project has changed levels of political participation and the self-confidence of and sense of safety and security felt by individuals.

SECTION 3

MAKING A DIFFERENCE

The strongest argument in favor of a rights-based approach to development is its strong “value added” quality, which contrasts with other approaches based on charity or traditional economic and development goals. In an opening statement to the United Nations General Assembly Special Session on Social Development, held in Geneva in June 2000, the High Commissioner for Human Rights indicated that rights-based approaches offer the promise of more effective, sustainable, rational and genuine development processes. The ICRW-supported projects discussed in this report reflect such value added aspects, some of which are discussed below.¹⁵

More effective and complete analyses. Traditional poverty analyses are based solely on income-related and other economic indicators. A human rights analysis reveals additional concerns of the poor, including powerlessness and social exclusion. This broader analysis yields better responses and better results. It also creates a deeper understanding of rights, including a causal analysis of rights violations and possible mechanisms through which to realize rights. For example, in projects with a rights-based approach, some ICRW partners clearly articulated their understanding of rights, while others expressed the importance of understanding the particular right they are working on.

The ANANDI/TISS study involved a contextual, detailed analysis of women’s status, discrimination within a social structure, access to and control over social, economic, natural and legal resources, the nature of governance and other issues. Specifically, the project developed case studies of particular women (including those who have emerged as local leaders) to illustrate dimensions of leadership and the tension that can exist between the public and private spheres of their lives. The case studies also provided insights

into the process of empowerment and how a woman negotiates—both in her personal life and as a leader of a collective—within the context of vulnerability and everyday life experiences. This in-depth analysis highlighted the process through which poor women assert rights to both food and livelihood.

Greater normative clarity and detail. National and international instruments and human rights documents that define development (including with regard to such issues as health, education, housing, food, governance and justice) help to elucidate specific concerns over rights.

For example, in the ThinkSoft/ASP project, the Indian Supreme Court’s interim orders on food-related rights (from 2001 to the present) became the basis for advocacy efforts on the justiciable right to food in the state of Andhra Pradesh. Similarly, Supreme Court guidelines on sexual harassment in the workplace created a legal basis for the Sanhita project’s work with employers and employees to secure women’s rights to a safe and secure workplace. Sanhita’s participation in the committees established to redress complaints within organizations (which were set up at every workplace per Supreme Court guidelines) enabled women victims to articulate the violation of their rights and to make employers accountable and legally bound to take preventive, proactive action following complaints. In addition, Sanhita’s involvement in processes of redress helped clarify the range of rights that are violated, including rights to life, equal opportunity, and freedom from discrimination.

Legal instruments also framed the YUVA/ICRW project’s campaigns on the right of single women to housing. The right to housing is defined in India through the judicial interpretation of the fundamental

¹⁵ Some of these points have been adapted from “How do rights-based approaches differ and what is the value added?” in Human Rights in Development. United Nations Office of High Commissioner for Human Rights, <http://www.unhcr.ch/development/approaches-07.html>, accessed October 2005.

right to life, rather than by any direct guarantees in the Indian constitution.¹⁶ During the 1980s, such legal interpretations largely associated the “right to live with human dignity” with access to adequate nutrition, clothing and shelter.¹⁷ In 1990, this perspective was taken a step further by the statement that “reasonable residence is an indispensable necessity” for human development and the fulfillment of the “right to life.”¹⁸ The recent Hindu Succession (Amendment) Act of 2005 is a landmark in the struggle for women’s rights because it addresses inequalities on several fronts—thereby supporting a range of rights not previously acknowledged, and strengthening YUVA’s efforts to secure single women’s rights to housing.

Enhanced accountability. The identification of duty-bearers and their responsibilities in the development process forms the basis for ensuring accountability. In this way, development processes move out of the realm of charity into that of obligation, a change that makes it easier to monitor progress.

In SBMA/EGG’s experience, a rights-based model for the education of girls appears to have facilitated a cultural shift in traditional communities, where the rather fatalistic passivity that fosters a continuation of habits—a view that things are done merely because “that’s the way we have always done them”—shifted to a more active, conscious and creative frame of mind that sees opportunities for people to take control of and improve their lives. For the purposes of the project, the most important manifestation of this shift in consciousness was an emerging sense of responsibility throughout the community to fulfill the right of girls to education.

Greater ownership and participation. A greater sense of investment in development often occurs when direct and indirect stakeholders are responsible for and in charge of development processes and outcomes.

In this way, they are engaged not only in immediate, ongoing development interventions, but also in establishing mechanisms for sustaining impact.

In developing a model for realizing the right to education, the SBMA/EGG project gathered information and facilitated the preparation of an action plan for an intervention. Its baseline survey included sections on school infrastructure and facilities; in-house school management and teachers; attitudes of girls towards education and the school environment; parents’ attitudes towards girls’ education; information about female drop-outs; and the functioning of school management committees and village education committees. Outreach to village heads, teachers, the members of welfare groups for women and youth, parents, drop-outs and (when possible) officials from the education department spurred a strong sense of involvement in the intervention on the part of stakeholders.

The YUVA/ICRW project analyzing YUVA’s work on single women’s right to housing showed how an action research methodology could be tailored as appropriate in a given context. Because of the sensitive nature of the issue being studied, a conscious decision was made to include single women from the community as investigators and surveyors. This made it easier to reach other single women in the community, in turn creating an enabling environment in which they could discuss their problems and facilitating a sense of ownership during the formulation and implementation stages of the intervention program.

As a result of their participation in the ThinkSoft/ASP baseline study, one of the *mandal* (district) teams engaged in the research joined the state level campaign on the right to food. The team presented its findings at a national level workshop on PDS, a reflection of their involvement in and commitment to the issue.

¹⁶ The right not to be deprived of one’s property, listed under articles 19(1)(f) and 31 of the Fundamental Rights provided by the Indian Constitution, was repealed in 1977. However, indirect references to the right to housing are included in Articles 19(1)(e), 38(1, 2), 39(a) and 47 of the constitution. These articles contain references to the freedom to settle in any part of the country, a just social order, equal access to status, facilities and opportunities and adequate means of livelihood and standards of living. (As quoted in “Single Women and The Right To Housing: The Need for Research and Intervention,” a research study by YUVA and ICRW. 2005.)

¹⁷ Francis Coralie v. The Union Territory of Delhi, 1 SCC 608 (1981) and Francis Mullin v. Union Territory of Delhi, 2 SCR 516 (1982). (As quoted in “Single Women and The Right To Housing: The Need for Research and Intervention,” a research study by YUVA and ICRW. 2005.)

¹⁸ Shantistar Builders v. Naryan Khimalal Totome & Others, 1 SCC 520 (1990). (As quoted in “Single Women and The Right To Housing: The Need for Research and Intervention,” a research study by YUVA and ICRW. 2005.)

A more authoritative basis for advocacy and claims on resources. International legal obligations and national commitments empower development advocates and give them greater authority. This may become clear during the quest to see basic social services given priority over military expenditures, or when advocates sound the alarm because the progressive realization of economic and social rights stalls, is reversed, or is compromised by conflicting trade or economic adjustment agreements.

During the ThinkSoft/ASP project, a stronger basis for advocacy was created by providing information to people and organizations that enabled them to formulate challenges when rights were violated. For example, ThinkSoft/ASP informed groups with whom they worked, as well as community leaders and activists, about a little-known provision in India's Criminal Procedure Code that complaints regarding violations of rights can be filed in local courts. This is a fairly accessible means of recourse for those who have suffered rights violations—yet, few have taken advantage of this provision; in fact, very few lawyers (even sympathetic ones) even know how to do so.

Higher levels of knowledge and skills. Because the fulfillment of rights is related to a sense of empowerment, the rights-based approach to development aims to build an integrated understanding of what rights actually are. In addition, it can improve the skills needed by a community to respond to and take responsibility for actualizing rights.

The ANANDI project used knowledge- and skill-building strategies related to issues identified by the community involved. Through an emphasis on empowerment and by responding to emerging contexts, circumstances and needs, ANANDI enabled women to imagine change and identify ways to achieve it. Examples include the training of members of *mahila mandals* (women's groups) and developing alternative frameworks for examining real-life situations. The ideas that emerged through the training formed the basis for processes that in turn can enable women to challenge asymmetrical power relations and patriarchy in particular situations. This has been an important principle of action for ANANDI, since the collectives involved in the project can influence development processes in their own regions.

Including a strong empowerment component in a rights-based framework

The ANANDI team strongly believes that the various rights enshrined in India's constitution and international instruments (such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women) form the value framework that guides intervention. The empowerment approach provides the nuts and bolts for organizing communities, particularly those with poor women, around these values and ideas.

Human rights are absolute and well defined. However, their meaning at a given point in time and the social conditions that enable or prevent access to and enjoyment of rights are subject to a constant process of negotiation and struggle and are influenced by caste, class, gender, ethnicity and other factors. The constant process of negotiating for greater access, decision making and control is part of the ever-evolving process of empowerment.

In the case of the Glocal/SHEC project, the women's success on the demonstration farm related to cottonseed production increased the women's confidence, which in turn bolstered their advocacy and lobbying skills. As a result, the village committee of women's groups in Katriki village passed a resolution in December 2004 demanding that farmers employ women instead of children on their farms.

Integrated safeguards against unintentional harm. There is no shortage of examples of the harm that can be caused by development plans, projects and activities that do not account for human rights concerns. A rights-based approach therefore includes measures to protect against threats to the rights and well-being of the poor and marginalized, which are incorporated into development plans, policies and projects at the outset. While such development initiatives inherently seek to empower local participants, they are also expressly required to guard against reinforcing existing power imbalances, such as those between women and men, landowners and peasants, and workers and employers.

Preventing the violation of rights was integrated into the ANANDI project. An ongoing process of reflection and the questioning of issues related to power relations, discrimination, access to and control

over resources and caste and class relations was initiated through training camps for women's groups. Participants identified possible threats to actions they wished to take and identified problems and solutions.

SECTION 4

CHALLENGES AND LOOKING AHEAD

Ultimately, however it is operationalized, a rights-based approach would mean little if it has no potential to achieve a positive transformation of power relations among the various development actors. Thus, however any agency articulates its vision for a rights-based approach, it must be interrogated for the extent to which it enables those whose lives are affected the most to articulate their priorities and claim genuine accountability from development agencies, and also the extent to which the agencies become critically self-aware and address inherent power inequalities in their interaction with those people.

– Celestine Nyamu-Musembi and
Andrea Cornwall¹⁹

4.1. Challenges to realizing a rights-based approach

The experiences of several groups within and outside India show that a rights-based approach to development is effective in ensuring that human rights violations are recognized and countered both in the field and through policy change and enforcement. At the same time, several challenges must be addressed to move from the rhetoric and terminology of rights to the actual realization of rights. The experience of the six projects helped to identify five key challenges that must be met to achieve effective results.

How was a rights-based approach initially understood and how were rights defined? Rights are often viewed within a legalistic context that is more technical than empowering. Such a perspective focuses on what the law says, ignoring the dynamic aspect of the political process that determines the extent to

which rights are enforced and realized in people's daily lives. It is important that the inherent value system and underlying rationale of a rights-based approach are kept in mind when the right is defined.

A related issue is the need to define rights violations. For example, the ThinkSoft/ASP project team found it difficult to assess and gather data on the extent of perennial hunger within village communities. Data generated on poverty and the agricultural crisis raised the question of whether the right to food is about ending hunger or creating food security solely in terms of grain stocks.

In addition, it is important to determine whose rights are being discussed. The question of whose rights actually count often compels development organizations to examine the values and power structures that exclude certain sectors of society while granting privileges to others. If women see themselves as powerless, as unable to act or respond in alternative ways, then the rights of the dominant communities will always be upheld and asserted.²⁰

Finally, the following conversation from the SBMA/EGG study illustrates the challenge faced by several organizations to assess the degree to which stakeholders understand a right, as the following exchange illustrates:

Project Staff: *Why did you leave school?*

Girl: *I have to get married.*

Project Staff: *Would you like to continue to go to school?*

Girl: *Yes, but I have to get married.*

Project Staff: *Why?*

Girl: *My parents want me to get married.*

¹⁹ Nyamu-Musembi, Celestine and Andrea Cornwall. 2004. *What is the "rights-based approach" all about? Perspectives from international development agencies.* IDS Working Paper 234. Sussex: IDS.

²⁰ ANANDI-TISS. 2005. "Rights-Based Development for Women: Moving from Theory to Action. An engagement with an Empowerment Approach to Sustainable Livelihoods and Food Security."

Project Staff: *Do you know that you can refuse to marry? You have a right to continue to go to school.*

Girl (blank stare): *I should obey my parents.*

How and when should primary and secondary stakeholders be engaged in the development process? How can a balance between groups of stakeholders be maintained? For example, the ANANDI project team indicated that a conscious effort was made to interview more sensitive officials who could appreciate the vulnerabilities experienced by women and the work of ANANDI. These interviews aimed to capture the position of government officials, who are responsible for ensuring the food security and livelihoods of people in their jurisdiction (i.e., either a village, a taluka [block] or at the district level). These officials tried to answer questions such as: How should district officials who have been compelled to respond to collective struggles view the assertion of rights by women? What is the perception among stakeholders of women’s articulation of their rights, the pressure placed on an official structure, and of ANANDI and its work? Do the state and its incumbent officials view themselves as duty-bearers?

The Glocal/SHEC project brought all the major stakeholders involved together and highlighted the common ground among them that could provide a basis for their work. The women, the government and the seed companies then worked together, a process that was facilitated by researchers. In addition, the demonstration farm helped women to build linkages with the outside world, especially with the media and NGOs.

What incentives are created to encourage participation and sustain the impact of development efforts? Experience shows that incentives are usually viewed as being material in nature. However, when applying a rights-based approach, they may have to take on other, non-monetary forms.

For Sanhita, the need to operationalize the Supreme Court Guidelines was particularly challenging. Throughout the project, employers continued to interpret sexual harassment as a non-issue, and

measures to create harassment-free workplaces remained a difficult goal to achieve. Initiating work on the issue of sexual harassment in such a context required “translating” the spirit and content of the Guidelines and applying them to existing workplace conditions. Breaking the silence and denial surrounding the issue became essential, and was achieved by highlighting data and evidence on the prevalence and dynamics of sexual harassment. Dialogue with authorities began with initial forays to provide them with information on sexual harassment and the Guidelines—an effort that in a sense served as an incentive to participate in the process. The engagement of specific workplaces around the issue of sexual harassment took several forms, including dialogue, consultative meetings, incorporation of information into staff training curricula, and the broad dissemination of information to the workforce. For employees, this meant initiating dialogue on a real-life, prevalent issue, which had previously been prohibited.

For the Glocal/SHEC team, publicity on and media coverage of government officials engaged in the project and women’s groups who were running the demonstration farm served as an incentive to achieve the fulfillment of rights. This aspect was also important in terms of informing public opinion and building support for similar actions at the grassroots level.

When and to what extent does an organization take confrontational action? The ThinkSoft/ASP team pointed out that the relationship of a community-based organization with the state can be many things at the same time, including confrontational, cordial, responsive and negotiable.

The Glocal/SHEC project illustrated the fact that there are limitations to the forms of protest that NGOs can pursue. Direct conflict is not generally favored by NGOs as a mechanism for asserting rights. (This view was also held by SHEC, the implementing agency for the girl child labor and unemployed women project in Andhra Pradesh.) With regard to the issue of negotiating over prices for cottonseed procurement, the implementing agency preferred to use advocacy, lobbying, networking with other NGOs and relationships with social investment groups in Europe to bring pressure on multinational seed companies.

SHEC believes that NGOs are not isolated actors in the development arena, especially in the context of a rights-based approach for development, when alliances/networks have to be established or when issues become the domain of political parties or movements at some point during the development process. Regarding the role of the Communist (Marxist) Party of India in securing a higher procurement price for cottonseed, SHEC noted that strategies included locking the *godowns* (storehouses) and the offices of seed companies in Kurnool for nearly 20 days; organizing regular *dharnas* (protests) at the Collectorate at the district headquarters; and raising the issue in the government assembly through elected members. This set of actions in turn led to an intervention by the agriculture minister, who discussed the problem with the seed companies—subsequently, the procurement price increased nominally.

What are the implications of prioritizing processes over outputs and deliverables? SBMA/EGG noted that a short timeframe does not allow for the implementation of a project using rights-based strategies or the achievement of viable, sustainable outcomes. An organization therefore has to be willing to put effort into long-term planning in order to implement a rights-based approach.

Another challenge is the openness of an organization to undergo the kind of internal change that is required to effectively implement a rights-based approach to development. Such change can include building the capacity of staff to adopt a rights framework; investing in processes for building participation and a sense of ownership; engaging in the building of coalitions and networks; and establishing monitoring and evaluation systems. All of these steps in turn require the commitment of adequate financial and human resources.

A rights-based approach to development requires a significant shift in the practices of development organizations. The six projects discussed in this report demonstrate that such a shift is possible and that the resulting challenges are indeed surmountable. According to the experience of the six project teams, the effort involved is worthwhile. As one team member of the SBMA/EGG project remarked, “there is a shift in power relations between us and the community. We are accountable to them; there is no possibility of mechanically doing our work, we have to be responsive, agile ...”²¹

²¹ Meeting of Technical Advisory Group for the project Moving from Rhetoric to Reality: Rights Based Approaches to Development, New Delhi, March 18, 2000

CONCLUSION

This report brings together lessons learned of six projects that applied a rights-based approach to development. Using different strategies to fulfill different rights—to food, livelihood, education, work, housing, freedom from sexual harassment and overall development—eight organizations from five states in India (Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Uttaranchal and West Bengal) worked to protect and promote the rights of women and girls who face significant violations of their rights.

This report on lessons learned from these six projects has highlighted a range of economic, social, cultural and political rights (as entrenched in national and international legal instruments) that must be recognized and respected for social justice and social

change to be realized. It also makes clear that the pursuit of one or more of the objectives of a rights-based approach by the six partners has helped pave the way for enhancing the strategies and outcomes of the approach as a whole.

The eight organizations involved in this project articulated, defined, refined and questioned the viability of a rights-based approach to development. They did so in the contexts of each respective project, and they identified various outcomes that such an approach creates for their own work. It is hoped that this report will pave the way to an enriched debate on and increased use of a rights-based approach to development, particularly with regard to its benefits for poor and marginalized people around the world.

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