

**CHANGING STATUS OF WOMEN**  
Impact of Akrsp(I)'S Interventions In Bharuch District, Gujarat

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## **CHANGING STATUS OF WOMEN**

### **IMPACT OF AKRSP(I)'S INTERVENTIONS IN BHARUCH DISTRICT, GUJARAT**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

The real wealth of a nation is its people, both women and men. All efforts made for development go waste if an environment is not created where people can enjoy a healthy and creative life. People are at the center of development and human well being should be the end result of development. The basic objective of development is to give more choices to all people. These choices broadly consist of four major components:

1. Economic growth to enrich people's lives, in other words, increased income to enable people to enjoy a decent standard of living.
2. Equal opportunity for all people (all castes, classes and gender) to take benefits of developmental activities.
3. Sustainability of equal opportunities, institutions and environment within and among generations, enabling all generations present and future, to make the best use of their capabilities in a collective manner, within the carrying capacity of nature.
4. Empowerment of people to enable them to participate in the development process and benefit from it.

The process of development becomes unjust and discriminatory if women are excluded from its benefits either directly or indirectly. The continuous exclusion of women from social, economic and environmental development results in an imbalance in development. Often it is assumed that the benefits of development automatically trickle down to all income classes and it has a similar impact on both women and men. In reality the process is otherwise, and most of the benefits go to the economically better off and socially powerful people and unless and until strong and definite efforts are made, the weak are not able to grow.

Most of the world's people are poor and disadvantaged, and most of these are women. For sustainability of development, all technologies should be gender neutral, in other words they should be designed in such a way that women and men both can use and get benefits from them. The major bottleneck to gender-neutral development is that still most of the technocrats, development professionals and administrators are men, and they assume that if they reach men and provide them benefits of development, these will automatically reach the whole population including women and children.

It is important to understand that women have different roles to play in society and therefore their development needs are different. They need to be involved at each stage of development to determine and attain these needs. Many facilities provided under development plans remain unused, because traditionally women were using them but new facilities are designed mostly keeping men in mind. Women must be regarded as both agents and beneficiaries of change.

Fairer opportunities given to women lead to their development and through them also contribute to development of other family members. They play a major role in household maintenance, subsistence and production sectors as defined below:

**Maintenance:** Domestic activities such as food preparation and serving, fetching water, washing, cleaning, dusting, child care, nursing of sick household members, and house maintenance.

**Subsistence:** Production activities carried out for household consumption and not for market such as kitchen gardening, poultry, animal husbandry, fishing, grinding grains, stitching clothes, repairing torn clothes and stitching quilt from used clothes.

**Production:** Income generating activities performed for economic profit either in cash or kind (cultivation, animal husbandry, handicrafts, weaving, etc.)

Investing in women's capabilities and empowering them is *one* of the surest ways to contribute to economic and overall growth. Empowering women by ensuring equal rights and access to land, credit and job opportunities benefits the whole family and a major portion of the society.

### **WOMEN IN DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME IN AKRSP**

Aga Khan Rural Support Programme (India) or AKRSP (I) is a non-Government organization working in three backward districts of Gujarat:

1. Bharuch (tribal with hilly and high rain fall physiography)
2. Junagadh (salinity prone physiography)
3. Surendranagar (Drought prone physiography)

The organization works for empowerment of rural communities, particularly the underprivileged and women through development of natural and human resources and strives to make the development process more equitable and sustainable. Furthermore the organization strongly advocates a gender sensitive approach and incorporating it into the entire spectrum of its activities so that women and men both get equal opportunities to participate in developmental activities, and benefit from them. The focus on women in the programme received a strong boost with the employment of a senior executive in 1991 to focus on women in development. The organization formally switched to a gender approach in 1994. It is widely felt that this has had an impact on women.

The organization uses **Moser** and **Harvard** frameworks through Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) to understand different activities carried out by rural women and men. All activities are divided into three main categories: **Productive** (employment, paid or self), **Reproductive** (rearing and nurturing the family) and **Social** (meetings, politics, sports, religion, cultural). A large number of PRAs carried out using the above framework by the AKRSP staff indicate that women play a major role in productive and reproductive activities and a very small role in social activities. On an average rural men work from eight to twelve hours in a day, women work 15 to 18 hours. Women work for much longer hours than men but they do not play a major role in decision-making. Average time per day spent by women on different activities is given below:

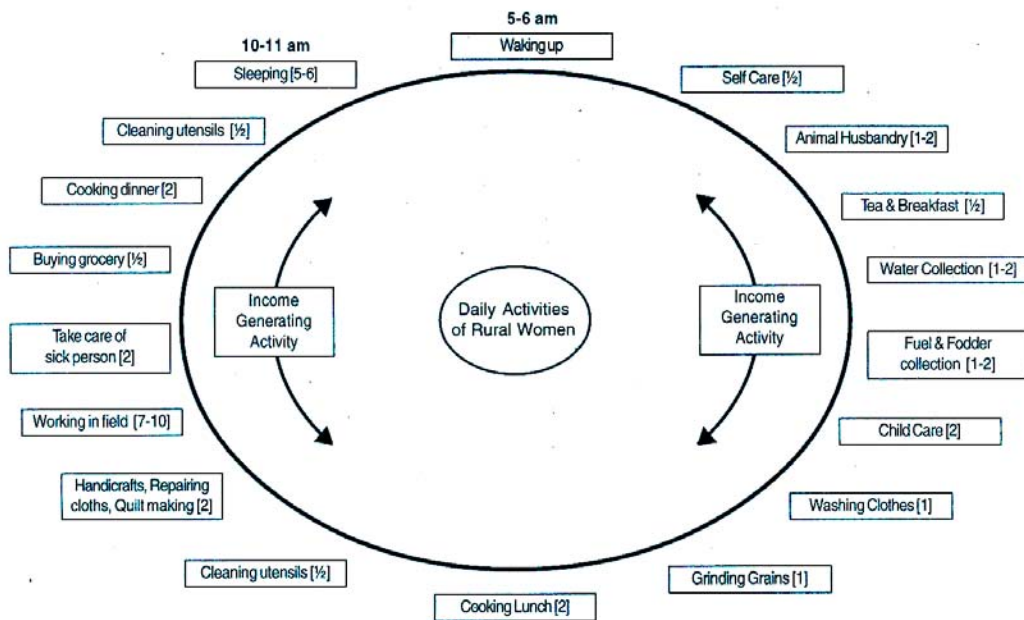
Productive Activities	eight hours
Reproductive Activities	nine hours
Social Activities	one hour

**Table:1** Time Spent by Rural Women On Different Activities in a Day

Sr.No	Activity	Time in hours
1	Sleeping	5
2	Grinding grains	1
3	Food preparation and saving	4
4	cleaning and storage of grains	1
5	Animal Husbandry	3
6	Child care	2
7	Other household work (washing, cleaning, dusting)	2
8	Self-care, rest, eating	2
9	Handicraft	2
10	fetching water	2
11	Fuel and fodder collection	2
12	Agriculture cleaning of fields, sowing, weeding, harvesting, storage and caring of seeds)	10

Source.. Down To Earth, Jan.31, 1998 (Pg. 60) and various PRAs done by the AKRSP staff

**Diagram :1 - More Work and Less Rest for Rural Women**



Although women work to sustain their families and communities, most of their work is not measured in wages and therefore undervalued. Women are normally engaged in multiple tasks. Time allocation studies reflect more closely the multiplicity of tasks undertaken by most rural women and also their daily and seasonal movements for carrying out conventional labour work. Studies with a gender perspective prove that women in India are major producers of food in terms of value, volume and hours worked. In the production and preparation of plant foods, women use skills and knowledge, from preparation of seeds to harvesting and preserving the crops. Women's knowledge has been the mainstay of the indigenous dairy industry. In forestry too, women's knowledge is crucial to the use of biomass for feed and fertilizer, feed value of fodder species, value of firewood types, food products and species essential to agriculture related forestry.

Women are always busy in some work, and there is always pending work for them. If they do not go to the fields, they go to collect fodder and fuelwood, or if they stay at home they have to repair torn clothes or stitch quilts from old clothes, or they keep busy with some handicraft work. There is no concept of leisure time for rural women. AKRSP tries to make men and women realize this aspect of their life through its "Gender Sensitization Training Programmes".

Since all the three districts have different socio-physical characteristics, the gender development approach has a different impact in each area. It is important to study them separately for better understanding. The present study is done in Bharuch programme area of AKRSP (I).

### **STUDY AREA: BHARUCH**

In the Bharuch Programme area, as in AKRSP(I)'s programme overall, the main aim of the gender strategy is to bring women into the mainstream activities. In Bharuch mainstream activities are generally carried out by Gram Vikas Mandals (GVM), which originally consisted of male representatives of households. The obvious approach that was adopted was to open up these mandal's membership to women equally as to men. However, it was realised that making women members of GVM, on its own would not have an impact, as women might not be able to participate equally with men due to local taboos and lack of experience. It was also felt that there may be issues that women would be reluctant to discuss in front of men. It was therefore decided that as well as giving women membership in GVMs, they would also be encouraged to form their own organisations called Mahila Vikas Mandals (MVMs). In the MVMs they would be able to participate without dominance of men, would be able to discuss their own issues openly, and would begin to get the social skills and awareness that would allow them to participate better in the GVMs. This approach was adopted in 1994.

The major activity of MVM is savings which is also a condition to get membership in MVM. The women deposit Rs. 5 to Rs. 20 per month in MVM accounts as their savings. They can then get credit against their savings. In case any woman requires more credit than the money saved by her, she has to get two witnesses from the MVM members, who give a guarantee against her credit. This activity has increased access to credit for the women of MVM.

AKRSP (I) is trying to involve more women every year into its mainstream activities through MVMs. Table 2 indicates the number of MVMS and number of members from 1994 to 1997. Numbers of MVMs have increased from 15 in 1994 to 43 in 1997 and membership has increased from 516 in 1994 to 1986 in 1997. There is a 186% increase in MVMs and 284% increase in membership. Over a period of four years, savings by women and credit given to them have also increased significantly.

Table:2 No. Of MVMs, MVM Members, Savings In MVMs And Credit Given By MVMs in Bharuch Programme Area of AKRSP(I)

Year	No. of MVMs	Membership	Savings(in Rs.)	Credit (in Rs)
1994	15	516	46402	15847
1995	26	1327	433000	27000
1996	40	1566	598000	80000
1997	43	1986	734000	167700

Source: Annual Progress Reports of AKRSP(I)

The organization tries to bring women in the mainstream by encouraging them to become members of the GVMs. Being the main institution formed for overall development of village, it is important that women participate in the activities of the GVM, so that they can express their views. However, this is not easy and the organization has to work hard to involve them in the actual decision making process. Table no. 3 indicates that women's membership in traditionally male groups (GVMs) have been continuously increasing over the last four years.

**Table: 3** Year wise women membership in GVMs

Year	Women membership in GVMs
1994	151
1995	961
1996	1482
1997	2308

Source: Annual Progress Reports of AKRSP(I)

#### **OBJECTIVES:**

The study tries to investigate the extent of AKRSP(I)'s success in involving women in its activities and improving their social and economical status. Therefore the objectives of the study are to examine:

1. Increase in income of women due to different interventions
2. Women's control over their income
3. Level of savings of women and access to credit
4. Skill development through training and work experience in AKRSP(I)
5. Participation in social and political activities

## METHODOLOGY:

Multi stage random sampling method was used for the study. The study was done in nine MVM villages (20% of total MVM villages) of Bharuch programme area, representing different sub-micro regions. The names of sample villages are: Bedada, Gajargota, Khabji, Khopi, Koyalimandavi, Ladava, Moskut, Sarkui and Teliamba. A total of 122 women (100 MVM members comprising 25% of the total MVM members of the selected villages, and 22 non members) were formally interviewed through a questionnaire. Participatory Rural Appraisals (PRAs) were also used as a research method in four villages. Discussions were held with GVM male members, local shopkeepers and AKRSP staff for getting their views on the subject.

## FINDINGS OF THE STUDY:

### Increase In Income Of Women

On an average per year, there is a 45% increase in income of women from Rs. 2700 to Rs. 4000. The increase in income is mainly due to availability of labour work on construction sites of irrigation schemes, soil and water conservation treatments on their own fields and forestry operations. This increase however is temporary. That is, when AKRSP activities are over, the income decreases. A positive aspect of temporary increase in income is that part of this income is saved by women, which provides them some economic security, and is a base for regular savings in future and access to credit. When women's income increases, even temporarily they are encouraged to save, so that their savings base increases and can be utilized for further income generating activities. Increase in savings gives them economic security.

Permanent increase in income is due to the following factors. Availability of irrigation in homestead fields where women have control over the product, improvement of land due to soil and water conservation programme, and a share of forest produce in terms of fodder, fuel and other minor forest produce. Integration of programmes related to these various areas plays an important role in increasing income of women. Table 4 indicates that there is direct correlation between the number of programmes and absolute increase in income.

Table:4 Increase in income through programme intervention

No. of Programme	Sample Size	Income (in Rs.) before intervention	Income (in Rs.) after intervention	Net increase (in Rs.)	Increase (in percentage)
0	11	3659	3977	318	8
1	26	1477	2206	728	49
2	28	2767	3848	1081	39
3	31	2123	3225	1102	52
4	12	1570	3245	1675	106
5	16	1945	3615	1670	85
6	5	3020	5000	1980	65
Average	122 (total sample)	2735	3966	1231	45

Source: Field Work 1997



Table no. 4 indicates that there is only an eight percent increase in income of non-beneficiaries. In absolute terms too, the increase in non-beneficiaries' income is lowest. A Majority of the households benefited from one to three programmes, and increase in income of women of these households is between Rs. 700.to Rs. 1100. Very few \ households benefit from four to six programmes and increase in income of women of these households is between Rs. 1600 to Rs. 2000. It has been observed that availability of irrigation provides maximum increase in income of the whole household, but soil and water conservation and forestry programmes provide more sustainable income to women, as women are directly involved in those programmes.

It is observed that maximum benefits are acquired from integration of water resource development, soil and water conservation (contour bunding and gully plug), Agriculture extension and forestry. The integration of water resource development, soil and water conservation and agriculture extension is ideal for increasing capability of land and in turn income. Integration between forestry and soil and water conservation is also found to be acceptable for maximizing long-term benefits. A higher level of integration leads to more benefits.

### **Women's Control Over Their Income:**

Earlier in AKRSP (I) s programmes, if a couple (man and woman) worked as a unit, payment was made in the name of the man, and therefore the man received and controlled that money. When money goes to men, often it is used for their own indulgence such as liquor, going to cinema, eating outside in village hotels, or going to the city for fun.

Recognizing the seriousness of this problem AKRSP introduced a policy in which women get payment in their name for the work they do. When a couple does a job together, the woman gets 50% of the total wages as her share of work. Thus women get control over their share of wages. In Gopalia, Dadwala, Navagam Tudi, Khabaji, Sarkui, villages, during fieldwork fifty-two women expressed happiness about this change of AKRSP. They said that earlier men used to collect all wages and were using a major portion of that money for buying liquor and luxury items for themselves. Now, since women get their share in their own hands, they can spend more money on food and health of their children. They can also spare some money to spend on their personal needs.

When women get earnings in their own hands, they have control over that money. They can use this money for their own and their family's well being. Increase in the income of women leads to control over their own life and improvement in quality of life of the family. During our fieldwork many women expressed the view that if their income increased permanently they could afford to send their children to school and need not overload their children to carry out income generating activities. They could also buy medicines in time for themselves and for their children and avoid serious sickness for longer periods. Reduction in the number of days of sickness results in more days of work and in turn more income.

Under the soil and water conservation programme wada lands (homestead fields) are developed, over which women have control and full access. On improved wada lands they grow vegetables, some minor grains and pulses which they use for home consumption and the surplus they sell in the market. This results in increase in income of women. Since the amount they receive is lower compared to mainstream agriculture, men do not bother to take that money from the women and women get full control over that amount.

Improvement in wada land helps in increasing food consumption for the entire house and in turn improves nutrition levels. Table no. 5 indicates that nutrition has improved from an average per person per day of 2100 calories to 2250 calories and the average 23 grams of protein to 26 grams. Table no. 5 indicates that per person nutritional intake is still less than the recommended level, but the trend is improving. It is difficult to measure the actual increase in vitamin intake, but during the fieldwork it is observed that the average per person per day consumption of vegetables and fruits has increased from 100 grams to 250 grams. One could therefore assume an increase in the intake of Vitamins A and C.

**Table:5** Recommended Per Person Nutritional Requirement by FAO & WHO and actual intake before and after Intervention in the Study Area

Category	Recommended calories(Kcal)	Available before	Available after	Recommended Protein (gr)	Available before	Available after
Man	3000	2800	3000	37	30	34
Woman	2200	1900	2100	30	21	25
Adult children	2190	1975	2100	30	23	25
Young children	1830	1790	1800	25	20	22
Average Per Person	2300	2100	2250	30	23	26

- Sources: 1. Swaminathan, M: Principles of Nutrition & Dietetics  
 2. Baseline Impact & Monitoring Survey for AKRSP 1995-'96  
 3. Field Work 1997

**Men Decide To Share Wages With Women .....**

*In Rukhal village during the gender sensitization training programme it was found that 50% of work is done by women whenever a couple (a woman and a man) is employed to do a job, but the payment is made in the name of men. After the training programme all 32 participants (men and women both) decided that in future in such cases 50% percent payment would be made to women.*

Women mainly use their income to buy food, utensils, clothes and medicines for their household members. Occasionally they spend money on themselves to buy clothes, and ornaments. They also spend money on social celebrations. Often they help their friends and relatives with their increased income.

Conversely, when men get less money they spend less on liquor, which results in better behaviour with their wives. Increase in income has helped in generating confidence in women and improved their own and their children's quality of life. Table 6 indicates how a sample of 122 women have utilized their income.

**Table:6** Components Of Expenditure Done By Women

Components of Expenditure done by women.	No. of women (total sample 122)	Percentage
Food	60	49
Cloth	63	52
Medicine	54	44
Self	48	39
Agriculture	5	4
Animal Husbandry	1	1
Others	3	2

Source: Field work 1997

#### Increase In Savings By Women:

AKRSP has provided a facility to women to deposit their savings through MVMs. Earlier they did not have a safe place to save their money, and were not acquainted with the banking system. Furthermore, using a formal banking system is difficult for illiterate rural women. Before formation of MVMs women used to keep their savings in trunks, boxes of grain, under the bed or with friends from where they could take money during their difficulties. However, they could not save large amounts as these methods are not safe. Even now non-members and some member women use these methods of savings. Increased income and a safe place for savings encouraged women to save more. The level of savings of sample MVM members has increased from Rs. 20 - 50 to Rs. 100- 500 per year including MVM and other places. Though the member women keep the major portion of their savings with MVM, they still use other sources for easy access. Table 7 indicates number of sources used by women for savings and table 8 indicates number of women using different sources of savings. Table 7 indicates the number of women using only one source (by name) for saving their money and the number of women using multiple sources, which indicates that many women try to play safe. Table 8 indicates the intensity of use of a particular source for saving, regardless of single or multiple use.

**Table:7** Sources Used by Sample Women For Saving Money

Sources For Savings	No. Of Women	Percentage To Total
Do Not Save	5	4%
Save Only In Mvm	41	34%
Save Only In Home	15	12%
Save Only With Friends	2	2%
Save In More Than One Place	59	48%
Total Sample	122	100%

Source: Field Work 1997

MVM and home are the most common places for women to keep the money. Very few women keep money with friends, relatives and moneylenders. A few women cannot spare any money to save. There were only 5 women in the sample who do not save money anywhere, while other women save their money in MVMs, homes and other places. All sample MVM members save money in MVMs, while 70 sample women, including members and non-members, save money at home. 38 sample women partially rely on friends and other sources for saving their money.

**Table: 8** Different Sources for Saving Money Used by the Sample Women

<b>Places for saving money</b>	<b>No. of sample women</b>	<b>Percentage to total sample of 122</b>
No where	5	4%
MVMs	100	82%
Home	70	57%
Others	38	31%

Source: Field work 1997

**Note:** In the above table, one woman may be using more than one place for saving money therefore the total will not equal the total size of the sample i.e. 122

#### **Access To Credit**

With increase in savings, women's access to credit through MVMs has also increased. Earlier women had to face much difficulty to acquire loans as they do not have any resources such as land to provide a guarantee against the credit. Women had to face harassment by moneylenders and shopkeepers. Now through MVMs, women can take credit equal to three times of their savings, if they can get two other members as guarantors. A total of 36 sample women have borrowed sums through MVMs ranging from Rs.200 to 1500 in one year. They were also able to return the loans in time.

Till now, internal rotation of savings as credit has not taken place on a large scale in the area. There is a need to encourage greater rotation of savings in this way. There is also a need to sensitize women to use the credit facility for income generating activities, as well as consumption needs.

#### **PRA For Qualitative Assessment Of Credit Facility By Women.....**

A Venn diagram of a PRA method was used with women of Sarkui village for assessing the impact of Mahila Vikas Mandal on status of women. About 35 women participated in this exercise, and the results indicate a very positive impact on women's empowerment. (A case study is included as Annex.)

## **Reduction In Stress**

As mentioned above, women are always over burdened with routine work. In addition to that they have to migrate for survival of the family. The struggle to keep the family at least at the subsistence level, makes women's life full of stress. The organization tries to reduce women's mental stress through different methods.

Due to AKRSP's intervention distress migration has reduced, per person per year from 150.80 days to 90.120 days. Also the number of people who are migrating has reduced. Earlier the whole family used to migrate, but now only men migrate and women either migrate for a very short period or they stay back at home with their children. Reduction in migration reduces stress of women. Usually the destination of migration is sugarcane fields, where often they have to live in an open space and are not provided with even basic facilities by their employers. They have to work from 8.00 am to 6.00 PM., but there is no certainty of availability of work. Now as women can stay back at their homes, they can work according to their convenience, and their children can attend school regularly.

Though there are cases (mainly in canal irrigation schemes) where migration has stopped totally due to increase in agricultural production, in most villages migration reduces temporarily or partially. When AKRSP introduces a Water Resource Development programme such as construction of canal, check dam or lift irrigation, or the Forestry programme, people get labour work in their own village. However, when these works are over, people do not get the same level of employment in their own village again, and during the lean agricultural season have to resume migration.

Through the Biogas programme women are benefited significantly. The main benefits are a reduction in cooking time from five hours to two hours per day, and in fuel collection from 125 hours to 50 hours per year. Even time is saved on fuel processing, as lighting a chulha with fuel wood takes much more time than lighting a gas burner. Women have cited eye irritation, running nose and cough problems as the end result of cooking in a smoky kitchen environment year after year. Smokelessness and cleanliness are one of the primary advantages of biogas technology. (ref: Impact Assessment of Biogas Technology by TERI, Delhi) Till now AKRSP has installed 821 biogas plants in 33 villages.

Recently a plant-to-plant survey was done by SHT through two village workers, one man and one woman. The survey indicates that a total of 582 plants are efficiently working, 54 plants are working with less efficiency and 185 plants are non-functional due to minor problems like leakage in rubber tube, water blocking the gas pipe, breakage of knob, wearing of valve, blocking of stove etc. The organization has incorporated these findings in its feed back system, and is trying to establish a system for repair and maintenance.

Increase in savings, availability of credit in time and at a low interest rate, receiving minimum wages in their own hands, availability of water for household use, availability of a common platform through MVMs to discuss about problems, are some of the activities which help in reducing stress in women.

## **Development Of Skills Of Women:**

Due to AKRSP's intervention women's skills have developed. Some women, mainly MVM secretaries and chairpersons, have developed their reading and writing skills while holding posts. They prepare attendance registers, write minutes of the meetings, and deposit savings of the members. Narmadaben the secretary of Sarkui village MVM informed us that she could not practice her reading and writing skills for fifteen years after her marriage. When she got elected as MVM secretary she realized that she could use her reading and writing skills. Due to regular

writing and reading information material provided by AKRSP, her skill improved over a period of time. A similar response was given by the MVM secretaries and chairpersons of Khabji, Kadwali, Navagamtudi and Dadwala sample villages of the study. As MVM members women get exposure to the outside world, this provides them with confidence to express themselves in front of outsiders, particularly Government officials, politicians and officials of funding agencies. AKRSP recognizes that like men, women too have social and technical abilities which need to be nurtured and developed. Separate PRAs are organized with women, where women are asked to draw social and resource maps. Initially they hesitate to even hold a pen, but after a lot of encouragement they carry out these exercises very successfully. Through this whole process they come to know a lot about their potential. From nine sample villages 38 women said that earlier they were hesitant to even touch a pen in front of others, but due to the participation in PRA exercises they gained confidence. Now they draw maps and diagrams and write brief PRA reports.

Gender sensitization training programmes organized by AKRSP to an extent change the attitude of men towards women. They have begun realizing that women should also be given a chance to participate in developmental activities. When women go either to attend MVM meetings or go on exposure visits outside their village, men now take care of children and other household activities. In Sagbara village in April 1997, a meeting of MVM secretaries and chairpersons was organized for general orientation and account keeping. Eighteen women from nine villages which are located 6- 10 Km. from Sagbara attended the meeting. Since a direct bus was not available from their village, most of them walked upto 5 Km. to catch the bus. There are two indications of change in the attitude of men from this incident. One, the men let their wives or daughters go alone over such a long distance to attend the meeting, sacrificing their house work and wages for the day. Secondly the men took care of children and food during this time, recognising that their women also have a right to learn and acquire knowledge.

In Kanbudi village on the first day of a Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) women and men were asked to write their expectations of development in their village. The women did not come forward to give their expectations and said that they agreed with whatever the men had written. AKRSP workers who were organizing the PRA exercise encouraged women to express their views. They were given examples of success stories of other AKRSP villages. As a result on the second day of the PRA twenty women gave their expectations in writing.

In Rukhal village after "Gender Sensitization Training" women started attending Gram Vikas Mandal (GVM) or Village Development Institution meetings more regularly and actively participated by discussing with men about village problems. In Ladva village before Gender Sensitization training only three women were members in GVM. Traditionally it is assumed that the GVM is only a men's organization and that women do not have any role to play in it, while in reality the institution is for the overall development of the village and every person has an important role to play. After the training programme, 35 women eagerly came forward to become members of Gram Vikas Mandal and there was no resistance from the men of their houses.

Extension volunteers (EV) are villagers selected by other villagers to act as a bridge between AKRSP and villagers to provide them access to technological knowledge. Master Extension Volunteers (MEV) supervise the work of EVs and support extension activities in larger groups of villages. All AKRSP(I) natural resource management programmes have EVs and MEVs. Recognizing the competence of women, 71 have been appointed as EVs and three as MEVs in Bharuch Programme Area.

Women who hold prominent positions were also interviewed separately in order to know their perception of development. During the study period 15 MVM Secretaries, 12 MVM Chairpersons, 10 Extension volunteers(EV) and 3 Master Extension Volunteers (MEV) were interviewed. They said that due to AKRSP's intervention their level of confidence had increased. Radhaben (MEV Farm Forestry) of Kadwali village had attended a workshop on "Waste land Development Through Farm Forestry" organized by the Indian Farm Forestry Development Corporation Limited, Udaipur in 1996 as a resource person. She shared her experiences in farm forestry development with other participants. Similarly Surajben (MEV, forestry) of Moskut village attended a workshop on Joint Forest Management in Delhi. organized by the Society for Promotion of Waste land Development. Some of these women were taken to the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (Delhi), and different Agriculture Universities of Gujarat.

***Taraben Proves Her Worth As A Representative of Rural Women .....***

*Janbahar, a small village situated 16 kms east of Netrang, is home to Taraben, a 32 year old woman. She has studied upto the 4th class but refused to touch the pen during a mapping exercise in her village in 1992 as part of a Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA). Though finally she contributed quite a lot to the mapping she lacked confidence to actually do the drawing and writing.*

*Later when the women s group was formed, Taraben was selected by the village women as secretary. This was the turning point for her, and she took to her work very seriously. She persuaded AKRSP(I) to address the women's need for fuelwood. The women in this area have to walk 2-3 hours everyday to collect fuelwood for cooking. When AKRSP(I) intervened with biogas programmes, the women put Taraben's name forward as an Extension Volunteer (EV) of the biogas programme, and AKRSP(I) trained her for the programme and in maintaining stock registers. Now she maintains a stock register of 28 items, and a yearly check did not find a single mistake. Taraben's confidence has grown to such an extent that she now trains women of the neighbouring villages by staying with them and teaching them everything she knows about biogas and maintenance of registers.*

*Looking at her excellent performance as an EV, she was promoted to Master Extension volunteer in 1996. As a result of continuous training and feed back, she has started taking up more and more responsibilities. Besides supervising the EVs, she has been involved in users training and motivational meetings. During a masons camp in 1997, Taraben took a two hour session, both theory and practical, on the topic of site selection for constructing a biogas plant. Taraben has proved that given a chance, rural women have the capability to acquire all kinds of technical and managerial skills, and they can even train men!*

Source: Annual Progress Report 1997 and Field Notes

Women play an important role in agriculture. As mentioned earlier, women are involved in all major agricultural activities. For Indian women food crops are not only a source of food, they are also a source of fodder for cattle and straw for thatch and fuel. On a small piece of land, women try to grow as much as possible to fulfill their home requirement, and ensure their family a balanced nutritious diet. Women's contribution to agriculture, as generators of diverse biological sources for food, fodder, fertilizer, fuel and fibre, cannot be overlooked. The shift from local

varieties and local indigenous crop improvement strategies, without the involvement of women, can take away women's knowledge and control over seeds and genetic resources. Traditionally women have been seed custodians, therefore their knowledge and skills must be included in the formation of crop improvement strategies. AKRSP realizes the contribution of women to Indian agriculture, and the importance of their knowledge and skill in improving agriculture systems. Since 1994 it is involving women in its agriculture extension programme through training, demonstrations, and exposure visits. In the agriculture training programme and exposure visits organized by AKRSP' men and women both participate. Women are trained in horticulture, vegetable cultivation, and preparation of organic manure as an entrepreneurial activity. Through MVMs, vegetable nurseries are raised and sold to women and men farmers alike, but women are the main beneficiaries of this programme. In Khabji, Mandala and Bharada villages, 43,000 vegetable saplings were raised by women and were distributed to 54 farmers. Mango grafts have been distributed to women for their wada lands, and in most cases they have taken good care of them. In Ghodi village women have already started getting fruits from their alphonso mango trees, though there is not yet much marketable surplus. However, the whole household and even neighbours can eat their full of mangoes. Still, women are not actively involved in mainstream agriculture extension programmes like demonstration of improved varieties of cotton, paddy, pigeon pea, sorghum and wheat crops which are the main crops of the area and therefore they cannot play a role in decision-making. However, during the study almost all women indicated that men are intelligent enough to decide on the selection of crops, and they respect their decision. They have faith that the men would not make wrong decisions.

They however, like to have control over their wada lands for vegetable cultivation and tree plantation.

#### **Participation In Socio-Political Activities:**

Women have gained confidence to contest Panchayat elections. A number of women who are members of MVMs were elected as Sarpanches of village Panchayats. Seetaben of Siyali village, Savitaben of Bedada village and Meeraben of Sarkui village who were elected as Sarpanches told us during the field work that their association with AKRSP helped them to come forward to contest the elections. Many women informed us that after becoming the MVM members they started voting in political elections. Women started realizing that getting basic necessities is their fundamental right as citizens of this country and they should demand it, by exercising their right to vote.

In Munkapada village women have started asking for their rights. They have given an application to AKRSP to take up Soil and Water Conservation activities in wada lands, and to the Gram Panchayat office for deepening and cleaning the village drinking water well.

Most of the time Water Resource Development (WRD) is aimed at making water available for irrigation only. Development professionals tend to forget that water is used for other purposes also, particularly drinking, washing and bathing for which women have to use a lot of their energy and time. The staff members of AKRSP realize the role of women as water users. In WRD programmes the needs of other water users is also considered. On the sites of some check dams and group wells, facilities are provided to collect drinking water, wash clothes and take bath. These activities have been initiated in the check dams of Rojghat and Boripitha villages, and in the group wells of Moskut and Sajanvav villages. During the field work, ten sample women who are beneficiaries of these facilities expressed their gratitude for the concern showed by AKRSP for them. They said that earlier they had to walk long distances to avail these facilities. Now those facilities are available near their village, they save 30-40 minutes per day. Since earlier they had to walk long distances, they were not able to take bath and wash clothes every day, which used to cause many skin diseases. Now they can keep themselves and their children clean.



*Jamanaben is an EV of soil and Water Conservation programme in Khabji village. She lost her husband three years back. She was left alone without any means of livelihood, with a three year old son, therefore she had to go for labour work in other's fields, and during the lean agricultural season she had to migrate with other village women. She had real difficulty coping with the hard physical work. At this juncture AKRSP asked her if she was interested in working as an Extension Volunteer for the Soil and Water Conservation programme. She happily accepted the offer even though she has only studied upto VIII th class and had not used her literacy skills for a long time. However, she took up this task as a challenge and learnt all the technical skills, from measurement of slope to supervision of the construction of contour bunds and gully plugs. She gets Rs. 50-60 ( depending on the type of work) for carrying out work on one hectare of land. This year she earned Rs 4000 in five months, and with some extra wage labour she will be able to fulfill her requirements. Now she does not have to migrate and leave her child behind in the village with her relatives. Over a period of time she has gained confidence, and she now even guides other women to make important decisions.*

## **CONCLUSION**

AKRSP(I)'s intervention has had a discernible impact on rural women. The organization's good intentions are well reflected in this study. There is significant improvement in the economic status of women due to increase in income. Gender sensitization training programmes of the organization have made men think about bringing women into the mainstream of development activities. The saving and credit programme has provided women access to credit and protected them from harassment by money-lenders and shopkeepers. Reduction in migration due to improvement in employment opportunities, reduction in drudgery due to availability of biogas, and a water source near their homes have all helped in reducing stress in women. Development of different skills such as writing, reading, expression of opinion and ideas, masonry work, plantation, and agriculture extension has led to an increase in the confidence levels of women and a realization of their capabilities. AKRSP has provided a common platform to women in the form of Mahila Vikas Mandals to participate freely in different socio-political activities. The organization is making all efforts to involve women in all its development activities. Wherever possible, the organization tries to change programme design and policy so as to benefit women. Through PRA exercises, the organization provides freedom to women to express their views about improving development strategies. AKRSP tries to incorporate women's suggestions in mainstream programmes. AKRSP has developed its gender approach in such a way that women and men both come together for the overall development of their village and the community. To some extent the organization has the capability to bring about a revolutionary change in the development world, by nullifying the myth that women do not have ability to understand the techno-scientific aspects of development programmes. The organization tries to adopt a balanced approach to development. It does not look into only quantitative improvement of village institution members, but also lays emphasis on qualitative improvement. The organization gives equal importance to achievement of targets as well as adoption of an appropriate approach. Working with women in mainstream activities is not an easy task because of social structure, women's own inhibitions and low rating of themselves. There is still a long way to go but AKRSP is on the right track.

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**Assessing the quality impact of MVM by  
Venn diagramming**

PRA Conducted on 6 September 1997

By

Seema Joshi, Hasmukh Patel, Jaimati Desai, Natwar Singh, Nandkishor

Report Written on 17 April 1998

By

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## ASSESSING THE QUALITATIVE IMPACT OF MVM BY VENN DIAGRAMMING

Venn or Chapati diagram is widely used as a PRA tool to learn the importance attached by people to various persons or institutions affecting them or their environment. It helps to know people's perceptions about the roles played by various actors (individuals or institutions) and their relationships with them.

AKRSP(I) has motivated women in forty five villages in its Bharuch programme area to form Mahila Vikas Mandals (MVMs). MVMs serve as a platform for women to come together to share their problems and concerns and try to address them. Saving and credit is introduced as entry point activity in the MVMs.

Venn diagramming was done with the women of Sarkui village as part of the process of evaluating AKRSP(I)'s interventions with regards to women. Assessing the amount of savings and credit provided only quantitative data on benefits accruing to women through MVMs. Qualitative changes in women's lives could be assessed only by a technique which would record their perception of the role played by the MVM in various aspects of their lives. Hence Venn diagram was used as a participatory method to assess the impact of the Mahila Vikas Mandal on the status of women.

MVM Sarkui started in 1995 with eleven women, while the present membership is eighty seven. This MVM has taken up savings and credit as the primary activity. At present there is a two hundred percent rotation of money among the women members. This credit has been used for both production and consumption purposes. Thus the MVM has provided access and control to women, over credit. The easy availability of money, through the MVM to its members, for various credit needs, has also provided the women an opportunity to relish their changed role (money arranger).

The PRA was done with the members of Sarkui MVM, to know the qualitative change brought about by their Mandal in their lives, as far as their position in their family as well as in their village is concerned. For this, the Venn diagram was used for different situations in a slightly modified form. The participants felt that it was easier to make squares of paper instead of circles for denoting various actors in the exercise, so squares of various sizes were used. In this report, "square" and "chapati" words will be used interchangeably.

This exercise was done for analyzing situations before and after the formation of the MVM. First, discussion was initiated on issues like decision making in the household/village, availability and control of money, sources and terms of credit, etc., before the MVM was formed. Then the participants were asked to depict the picture of their household with the help of squares cut from paper. The size of the square depicted the status/importance of a person/ institution, while the distance from the house represented their influence on the decisions taken in the household. They choose a husband, wife, father/mother in law, a boy and a girl child as the actors for a typical household. The squares representing each, were placed by the participants according to the influence of each on the household. Then, they were asked to choose some actors for the village, keeping in mind the discussion held before. Village money lender, men in the village, women in the village, and AKRSP's representative were the actors when the same exercise was done for the village.

A similar exercise was repeated for the situation at present, when the women have an institution (MVM)of their own.

In the first picture prior to formation of the MVM, when we consider the household, the biggest chapati or square is that of the husband. It is also the one kept nearest to the house depicting his overall hold and influence. Wife's (women's) chapati is nearly half the size of that of the husband's and is kept at some distance *from* the house. It is even small than the father in law's chapati, meaning lesser status or control over decisions in the household than the other two.

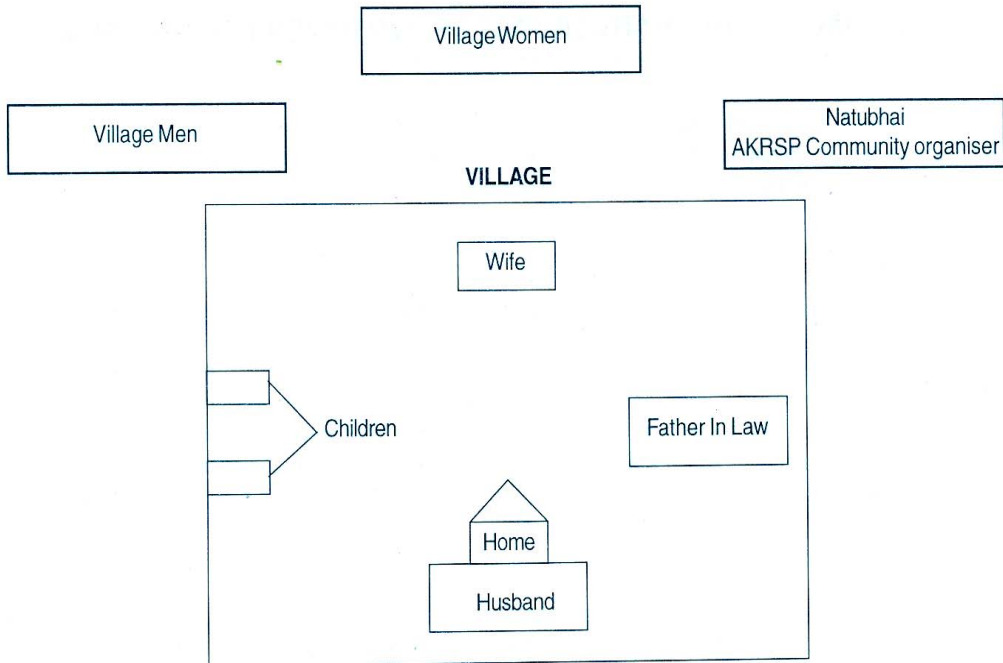


Diagram - 1

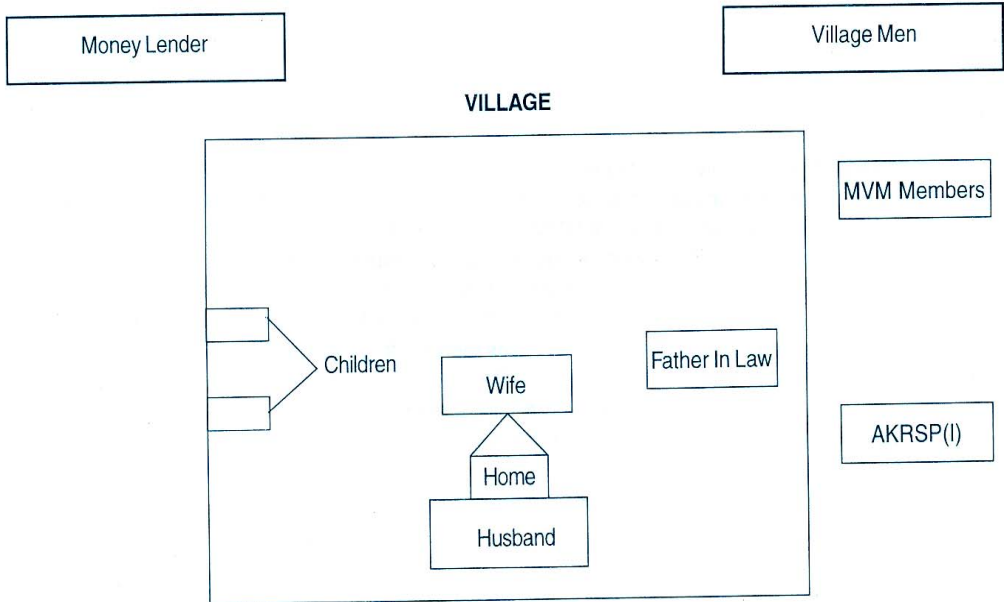


Diagram : 2

In the diagram two showing the present situation, very interesting changes were found. Not only the distance of wife's chapati from the house decreased, but also its size increased. It became equal to that of father in law's chapati and was kept nearer to the house than his. It was also discussed and agreed among the women that although they still had less say than their husband's, it was certainly equal to or more than their father in law's. Since money is available to them for various needs, men of the household now ask them before doing anything.

When talking about the village, the biggest chapati in the earlier situation was of the money lender and it was kept very near to the village, depicting his supreme control over the life of village people. The participants discussed about their total dependency on the money lender, the uncertain availability of loan, huge interest rates and inhuman ways of recovering the credit. In the "after MVM" scenario, the money lender has been pushed far from the village and also the size of his chapati has been reduced quite a lot, representing a decrease in both his status and influence in the village.

The influence of women as a group was another interesting point. In the pre MVM picture, the participants denoted "village women" as a small square kept at a distance from the village showing that they were not as important or as influential as the men in the village. But after they have successfully carried out the activity of saving and credit for two years, and contributed significantly in the formation of a group-well in the village, they have become quite influential as a group in the village. As a result their chapati (MVM) was placed quite near to the village.

AKRSP was also not left alone. In the "pre MVM" scenario (picture one), the women of Sarkui knew only Natubhai, who used to visit their village and talk about making an institution. In the present situation AKRSP has become a big actor in their village. The difference between the size of chapati and its distance from the village was self explanatory.

After the exercise was completed, it was presented by two members before the whole group. The effect was all encompassing. Every women agreed to the analysis of the two situations completely. This self realization of their empowerment, was the most rewarding outcome of the whole exercise.

Date of exercise	:	6.9.97
No. of village women	:	16
Exercise was done by	:	Hasmukh Patel, Field Supervisor, AKRSP (I) and Seema Joshi, Programme Organizer, AKRSP (I)