A Slippery Terrain

Struggle and Learning in Baltistan's Women Organizations

Samira Kamil Tharani
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SAMIRA THARANI
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It is to Balti rural women and to the field workers and the activists that I owe this study to. I feel that they have much to say to a wider world.

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Abstract

For the purposes of this thesis, I can say that the educational work that I have addressed represents 'informal education' in that it is oriented towards transforming gendered power relations and shares the basic methodological principle building analytically and practically upon, the experiential knowledge of the learners themselves. The discussion is based on a detailed study of informal and incidental learning that takes place in Baltistan. Research presented in this thesis seeks to show that with women acting as men's equals rather than as mere auxiliaries, greater victories in the fight against poverty and deprivation may be won. Rather than being unwilling to participate in the development process, women are prevented from playing a full role in the political lives of their communities. Barriers both physical and intangible have been erected around decision-making arenas, and they operate to prevent women's participation. The attitudes of some women towards their subordinate position in society do not seem born of apathy or ignorance. Rather they stem from past experiences within their families, villages, and in the wider world, as well as from their experiences in the present. The women of Baltistan do have an embryonic understanding of power, powerlessness, and how the two interact to prevent action upon injustices. In order to understand and realize the value of such learning in struggle I have made an attempt to expose such learning through various case studies. Through examination of these case studies I argue that to challenge the *status quo* one has to engage in the current dominant, oppressive ideologies and discourses and brings forth the alternatives ones. The participatory methodologies applied in these case studies to unlearn the dominant and oppressive ideologies and learn liberatory ones were central to process of emanicaptory action. These case studies also unveil that processes of emancipatory learning and action are contradictory and complex.

Abstract

Pour cette these, j'ai mis l'emphase sur l'éducation 'informelle', soit une education qui est axée sur la transformation des relations de pouvoir entre les sexes. L'éducation informelle telle que représentée dans cette thèse est fondée analytiquement et de façon pratique sur les expériences propres aux personnes qui apprennent. La discussion se base sur une étude détaillée de l'apprentissage informel et fortuit dans un village de Baltistan. La recherche présentée dans cette thèse cherche à démontrer que lorsque les femmes agissent en égaux avec les hommes au lieu d'agir en tant qu'auxiliaires, il est davantage possible de faire avancer la lutte contre la pauvreté. Les femmes ne sont pas indisposées à s'impliquer, elles sont plutôt empêchées de jouer un plein role dans la vie politique de leurs villages. Des barrières physiques et intangibles sont dressées autour du processus politique et servent à prévenir l'implication des femmes dans les prises de décisions. Les attitudes de certaines femmes face à leur position subordonnée dans la société n'est pas due à l'apathie ou l'ignorance. Elles sont plutôt due à leurs expériences passées et présentes dans leurs familles, leurs villages et dans un plus grand context mondial. Les femmes de Baltistan ont une compréhension embrionique des relations de pouvoir et comment elles servent à prévenir l'action face aux injustices. Afin de comprendre la valeur de l'apprentissage qui se fait dans de telles luttes, j'ai tenté de mettre en évidence de cet apprentissage à travers des études de cas. En examinant des études de cas, je propose qu'afin de contester le *status quo*, on doit s'engager dans les idéologies dominantes et opprimantes et proposer des alternatives à ces idéologies. L'action émancipative dans ces études de cas est reliée à ce processus de désaprentisage des idéologies dominantes et opprimantes. Ces études de cas démontrent aussi que les processus d'apprentisage et d'action émancipatoire sont contradictoires et complexes.

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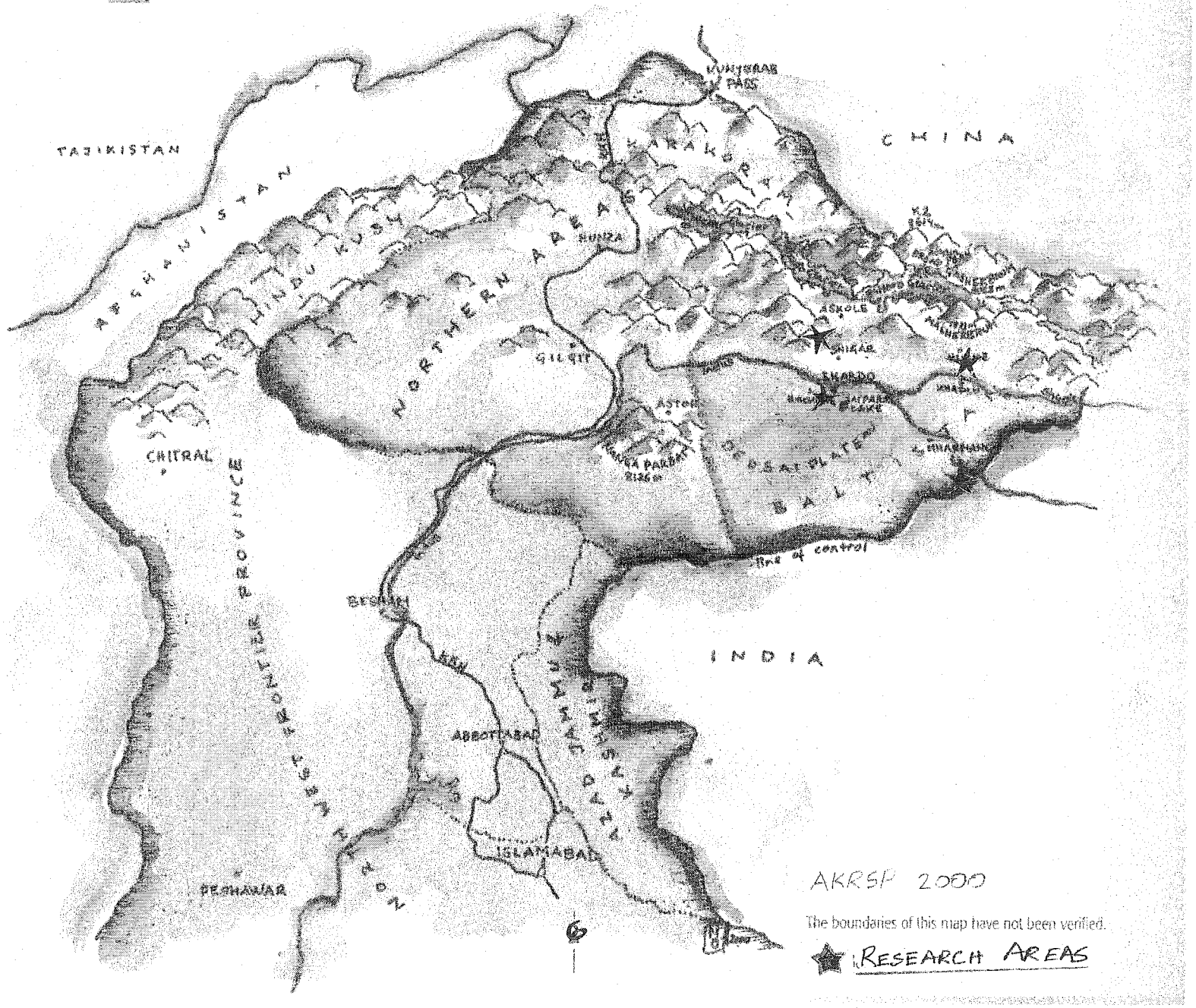
NORTHERN AREAS OF PAKISTAN



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List of Acronyms

AKRSP	Aga Khan Rural Support Program
CIDA	Canadian International Development Agency
AKF	Aga Khan Foundation
MT	Management Training
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
PRA	Participatory Rural Appraisal
VO	Village Organization
WO	Women Organization
WSO	Women Social Organizer
WP	AKRSP's Women's Program

Small Beginnings

About the Thesis: This thesis is about my attempt to understand and present ways in which people learn in their everyday life through various life experiences. This study is based on work I have done with rural women of Baltistan for over a year as a researcher, an educator and a community member. It describes the ways in which the women involved in these organizations learn and change, coming together to meet their own and community needs and creating a rich learning site for themselves in the process. It is also one of the central theses of the study to investigate how gender relations in Baltistan are a function of specific power struggle between men and women. Particular attention will be given to understand the dimension of power struggle in the gender relations in Baltistan within an analysis of social and cultural developments.

The core concepts in this discussion are power struggles and informal learning. Terry Eagleton (1989) states that history can be interpreted as being characterized by domination, unruptured oppression and exploitation-a series of struggles between different groups (p.167). Slavery, colonialism, patriarchy- all have been systems of domination. In these struggles one group for example, colonizers, men, feudal lords- tried to dominate another-indigenous people, women, and serfs. These attempts to dominate are not only connected to power and production but they also have an ideological dimension, it becomes part of peoples understanding of the situation and the way they speak about these situations. With time domination is internalized and becomes embedded in people's consciousness (Gaventa, 1982, p.22). But with domination comes struggle for liberation. History is also full of examples of continual struggle for autonomy by local people to maintain and extend control over their lives. The analysis of domination and struggle and its impact on the dynamics learning that occurs in the Women Organizations (WOs) will be the focus of this thesis. Analysis of the dynamics of informal learning in different sites can produce insights into the way people develop critical consciousness and to see themselves as social actors in struggle for autonomy and liberation. It is important to reiterate that these struggles are no 'sequential or logical' (Foley, 1999, p.48), but are complex and full of contradiction. All through the discussion I will set narratives of women's experiences alongside instances of their

development of critical consciousness so that judgements can be made about whether or not instances of collective action by the WOs are examples of critical learning.

I will begin by sketching my professional experience. I worked in the development field in Baltistan before coming to McGill to study education. I was working as a gender coordinator for a non-governmental organization called Aga Khan Rural Support Programme-Baltistan (AKRSP). The research on which this work is based has been conducted over a period of eighteen months. As indicated above, my interest is in the relationship of learning and people's struggle. As a gender coordinator for Women's Programme (WP) of AKRSP-Baltistan I have participated in, witnessed few of such struggles, ranging from women's efforts to maintain and extend control over their work, to their own struggles as women.

> In a small office in an agrarian village in the Northern Areas of Pakistan, a group of Women Social Organizers (WSOs) comes together for a meeting. These women are the staff members of a Women's Programme (WP) of a non-governmental organization. The talk is about the forth-coming training of local women in vegetable production. The conversation soon turns to the challenges faced by the women's programme in the organization. Some of the challenges identified by the women included: lack of integration of female staff members in planning of WP by the management, lack of communication between sections heads and female staff members, lack of interest by the section heads about the emerging demands of WP, lack of respect for the WP in the overall environment of the organization and also lack of leadership in the WP. The organization's problem related to gender issues in WP became more apparent when one women social organizer proclaimed that 'gender issues are so entrenched in the organization that it has become an unalterable fact of life.' WP's coordinator added that the section heads (all male) were unwilling to address the issue because it was too difficult, that it was a community and cultural issue not an organizational issue, and that it was typical throughout the area. A little later on in the meeting the women members started exploring both the course of action available for the WSOs and the consequent affect of each action taken. We continued this meeting next day where all the women social organizers seemed to be enthusiastic about taking a course of action for the WP. Same day discussion led to heightened collaboration among team members and in few hours we were all motivated and ready to take action with the agenda in hand.

I wrote this passage in one of my coursework during my graduate work, about learning in struggle, and I now think that this narrative encapsulates much of what I have to say about learning in everyday life and the prevalent gender power struggles in Baltistan. In the above passage learning for the Women Social Organizers (WSOs) and myself occurred incidentally and informally. This process of learning encouraged them to take into account their thoughts and experiences as WSOs. For me the most powerful learning occurs as people struggle to make

sense of their environment and explore ways of doing something about it.

The dialectic that emerges from the above passage also informs the reader about the system of gender relations in Baltistan. In Baltistan today what it is to be male and female can be understood as 'The woman belonged to the house, the man to 'the street', meaning the male domain of public life.' Hence, different and unequal resources flows to women, different and unequal access to knowledge and power, and different and unequal rights and room to maneuver as social actors (Gloeker, 1999, p.5). Social status of women in Baltistan is often linked with the cultural values referring the local, religion derived sensitivities about the position of women, and the gender realizations that are partly responsible for the apparent curtailment of their freedom as compared to men.

An important contention in this thesis is that in order to understand informal learning in social action, we need to take into account and develop understanding of that specific social context where the learning is taking place. In other words, observing learning in social action as socially constructed and embedded in conflicts. This thesis will attempt to place some signposts to understand such learning by applying concepts drawn from critical theory to data on informal learning in the WOs of Baltistan.

The case studies: When I interviewed women who had been active participants and witnesses of struggles around women's issues for last thirteen years in Baltistan, they seemed astonished at the learning that was revealed. They had been a part of profound learning but they never articulated it. They had been so focussed in the struggle around women's issues that they had not thought about learning. Yet it is their learning, as we will see, was profound and is of continuing use, to themselves and others. The learning in social movement sites and actions is largely informal and often incidental. It is embedded in action and is often not recognized as learning. The accounts of informal learning and power struggle told in the following chapters are clear examples of this.

It follows from the above argument that it is crucial to study incidental learning and to identify generally unrecognized (sometimes for the researchers) forms of learning and education. In order to understand and realize the value of such learning in struggle I have made an attempt to expose such learning through various case studies. These case studies comprise of non-formal and incidental learning in various forms of social activities and struggles. In doing so I have tried to capture how peoples' everyday learning experiences reproduces a distinct way of thinking and acting and also produces recognitions which enable people to critique, challenge and struggle against the existing order. In this thesis you will find examples of this process of reproduction and recognition. These case studies are located within a theoretical framework that seeks to explain power struggles operating between men and women of Baltistan.

Chapter One offers a theoretical model of the study of power and powerlessness based heavily on John Gaventa's work on the subject, and the arguments presented in this chapter will permeate and inform the rest of the study. A general discussion of women's social status in Baltistan has been conducted in Chapter Three. This approach will be helpful in revealing the shaping of patterns and routines that underlie contemporary power relations in Batistan. The analysis of incidental learning in conflict is also developed in depth in this chapter. It examines the emancipatory social struggles of AKRSP's Women's Programme (WP) in Baltistan since its initiation in 1986 to 2001. The focus of this chapter is the relationship between the gendered power relations in Baltistan on the one hand and changes in women's consciousness and action on the other. To argue that learning and education are ultimately determined by broader socio-cultural and political forces, is not to sink into crude determinism. But it is necessary to show how this determinism works itself through in particular situations. The analysis of Balti women's learning in this chapter will provide one example of this.

The next two chapters are detailed studies of informal and incidental learning that takes place in two villages of Baltistan. Two workshops were designed and conducted separately for men and women to explore the gender issues prevalent in the area. Through examination of these two gender workshops I argue that to challenge the *status quo* one has to engage in the current dominant, oppressive ideologies and discourses and bring forth the alternatives ones. The

participatory methodologies applied in these workshops to unlearn the dominant and oppressive ideologies and learn liberatory ones were central to process of emanicaptory action. These studies also show that processes of emancipatory learning and action are contradictory and complex.

In the Management training, the subject of Chapter Six, women participants experienced both instrumental and critical learning. They gained knowledge and skills in management issues. They also developed a recognition of their own ability to influence decision making, and experienced enhanced self-confidence and self-esteem, both as women and as groups. As already noted, all this was incidental learning- it was embedded in the social action and not articulated until I conducted the study with the participants.

A Conclusion briefly captures the argument presented in the thesis and suggests some directions for further research on the relationship of emancipatory struggle and learning. The recommendations found in this chapter have been conceived with the notion of overcoming barriers to women's empowerment, rather than attempting to augment their political efficacy within the community.

Methodology-people-centered perspectives: The field methods adopted for this research had a participatory focus. The aim was to use field methods to analyze social relations as means to encourage participation of all groups in dialogue and decision-making on competing and complementary needs and interests. However, participatory methods cannot guarantee socially just development. Much depends on objectives, power relations, ideologies and personalities.

I chose to adopt the people-centered methods of participation as it focuses on issues of power and control. It is concerned about the nature of the society in which programmes and projects are developed, rather than the technical and managerial aspects of organizations and participation in them. 'Inescapably, where development is concerned,' assert researchers from the Coady International Institute, 'participation is about power, an increase in the power of the disadvantaged' (Coady International Institute, 1989, p.17). The alternatives to traditional

approaches to participation are inspired by the works of Paolo Freire, whose process of conscientization lead to people's awareness of the structural caused of poverty and help build consensus and action based individual creativity and knowledge (Freire, 1972). E.F Schumacher's *Small is Beautiful* and Ignacy Sach's *The Discovery of the Third World* have also contribute to this process with their notions of alternative approaches to organizing community life and livelihoods (Schumacher, 1973; Sachs, 1976). Korten, writing in 1980, conceptualized the 'learning process approach', in which an essential component of the inductive style is to 'embrace error' and learn from one's mistakes, as an alternative to the 'blueprint' approach (Korten, 1980. p.480). Central to these approaches is the belief that ordinary people are capable of critical reflection and analysis and that their knowledge is relevant and necessary.

As a researcher and an educator I am concerned about both empowerment and participation. I regard empowerment as a process through which individuals, as well as local groups and communities, identify and shape their lives and the kind of society in which they live. Empowerment means that people are able to organize and influence change on the basis of their access to knowledge, to political processes and to financial, social, and natural resources.

Participation as a process of empowerment can help to amplify traditionally unacknowledged voices. It can strengthen the confidence of all members of a group in the knowledge and capacity of each and may foster the ability to question and contribute to both local and international systems of knowledge. This form of participation implies 'constant readjustment and on-going information exchange, discussion, and conflict management or resolution under complex, changing and highly uncertain conditions' (Rocheleau, 1994, p. 21). It involves consciousness-raising and knitting together a 'shared understanding of problems and a vision for the future that leads to commitment and ownership by the community' (Woodhill et al., 1992).

Choosing my tools of participation: One premise of this thesis is that raising awareness on both an individual and a community-wide level is an important part of an empowering process. Consciousness-raising in many communities work as a foundation for participation. I adopted tools that focus on ways to bring disadvantaged or excluded groups into decision-making process. These include tools to raise awareness not only about gender power struggles but also about other dimensions such as self-esteem and self-confidence etc. Some tools used for the research were particularly relevant for participatory research methods. These included focus group interviews, various mapping techniques and traditional tools, such as interactive workshops, which were used in participatory ways. In sum, the participatory methodology adapted for the research had following broad purposes:

- Collaborate with local groups to design action strategies and processes for social change bringing more just future;
- Facilitate community capacity building in way that address the practical and strategic interests of the disadvantaged, in community decision-making and organization;
- Promote a process of heightened group awareness of social variables which shape access to and control over resources within group or community.

Emerging Themes: The particular themes that are debated in this study and which have relevance for the discussion are: Silence and voice and the use of experience as a basis for both social analysis and validating how women see their lives; quest for empowerment, realizing that demand for change does not arise spontaneously from the conditions of subjugation, as a vital consideration in the design and facilitation of educational workshops; gender awareness; and the space, time and place for learning.

Silence and voice: A dominant metaphor within popular education especially gender education is that of silence and voice. Freire wrote of 'the culture of silence'; popular education, particularly that which involves literacy training, often speaks in terms of 'breaking the silence' and 'giving voice'(www.grassrootpolicy.org). Silence, as this thesis maintains, can be a strategy of resistance or one for holding on to power. The lesson of the perspectives on silence/voice offered in this

study is that popular education has to be sensitive to the context of silences and the power relations that they reflect. Equally, it must search for those media of 'voice' with which women learners are most comfortable and which offer ways to express often submerged feelings and perceptions.

Empowerment: The implicit meanings of empowerment in the various sections of this study range from an individual to a collective focus, and from self-validation and the building of self-esteem to working actively and concretely to change social conditions. Empowerment in this paper also means to gaining more decision-making capacity, to deepening understanding of the relations configuring ones' life and to controlling conditions affecting ones' life. Perhaps the most important result of the current focus on the notion of empowerment as discussed in this thesis is the process of reflecting on experience and collectively building alternative interpretation of the relations shaping one's life, builds confidence and capacity.

Gender awareness: As a facilitator a challenge I faced with the project was: whether to allow gender awareness emerge in an undirected process, or to promote critical reflection and transformation of oppressive gender relations. Gender workshops in popular education has the clear orientation of raising sensitivity to the ways in which gender structures social and economic developments. In working with conceptions of women and gender there is always a fine line between reinforcing particular constructs and meanings, and questioning not only the relations that produce women's oppression but also the prevailing conceptions of femininity.

Space, time and place for learning: Given the responsibility of rural women, a place away form 'the everyday' is often a catalyst in an empowering education process. As you will see in the thesis how a sense of a shared space and a platform imparted an enormous sense of confidence to the rural women of Baltistan. Much of my study took place within a workshop format of very limited duration, and various methodologies for maximizing the space and time were used. Ways to find immediate engagement of participants with a sense of community and commitment to shared goals was a constant struggle. Participants can experience transformation in their understandings; feel empowered but on returning home often gets weighed down by unchanged relations of oppression. I believe that popular education workshops like these should be

supported and should be linked to an ongoing process or social movement.

A Collective Project: This study is a collective project. The Women Organizations participated as equals in the project. This project is also a celebration of rural women in Baltistan. Through their participation they set out to show others how some of them have taken charge in the WOs. This project is also an eye opener for those who think of poor rural women as passive, submissive, compliant sufferers who sound rather dull. As you will read in later chapters of their responses and thoughts on rather sensitive issues. At these discussion women were generally delighted in the changes being made in their roles, even though all knew how small these changes are. As you will find women's pleasure in changes they are making will recur throughout the study: please appreciate it! This delight matters in itself. As this delight is a truth from which we can all learn.

Ψ

A Theory of War

A Theoretical Model of Power and Powerlessness

Why in a social relationship involving the domination of a non-elite by an elite, does challenge to that domination not occur? What is there in certain situations of social deprivation that prevents issues, from arising, grievances from being voiced, or interests from being recognized? Why, in an oppressed community where one might intuitively expect upheaval, does one instead find, or appear to find, quiescence? Under what conditions and against what obstacles does rebellion begin to emerge?

John Gaventa, Power and Powerlessness, 1982, p.3

The goal of this section is, as the title suggests, to provide a comprehensive working model of the dialectic between power and powerlessness that may be helpful in understanding the ensuing discussions of contemporary power relations in Baltistan. There are several sign boards posted around the city of Skardu, one of the signboards outside the Skardu airport reads 'Hijab is our culture, please respect it'[1]. One might wonder what significance the signboard has for understanding contemporary gender relations in Baltistan. The answer is that it is highly salient. In Baltistan, as in many other parts of the world women form the nexus of the politics of culture and the politics of development. By 'the politics of culture' I mean to say that aspects of the local culture, in particular those regarding women, have taken on political significance. The societal position regarding women in Baltistan is problematic in a sense that it traps the issue of women within the struggle over culture. For women, the reaffirmation of Islamic customs such as *purdah*[2] and *hijab* work as centerpiece of cultural protection. The signboard mentioned above is a poignant example of reaffirmation of Islamic culture. But gender relations in Baltistan are not merely informed by a particular historical period, they are also a function of specific power relations between men and women. From this point of view, a clear picture of the relations of women's subordination can only emerge from an investigation and analysis of the power relations from which 'culture' grows.

[1] Hijab maybe defined as the veiling of women in Islam

[2] Purdah maybe defined as the Islamic system of secluding women

Steven Lukes' presents a theoretical paradigm for understanding the nature of power and its role in allowing or suppressing participation by subordinate groups. Luke's explanation, further developed by Gaventa, suggests that power has three dimensions. The first is that of the traditional pluralists, this refers to the power to make decisions or influence those who make decisions. The second dimension is concerned with the use of power in the suppression of certain issues and participants in decision-making fora. Power's third face operates to control the conceptions of the subordinate group about potential issues over which it might act.

A simplified way of describing the power relationships that operate in the first dimension: *Smith and Joan have different interests. Smith has power over Joan if Smith can get Joan to do something that Joan would not otherwise do.* Power in the first dimension is essentially a behavioral framework, concerned with 'who participates, who gains and loses, and who prevails in decision-making' (Poslby, in Gaventa, p.5). It is easy to see why, with its aim of increasing the 'involvement of socially and economically marginalized people in decision-making over their own lives…[and to] empower local people with the skills and confidence to analyze their situation, reach consensus, make decisions and take actions, so as to improve their circumstances'. This approach to power has found a comfortable home with AKRSP (Gujit and Kaul Shah, 1998, p.1). The first dimensional approach requires that grievances are recognized and acted upon; second, participation should occur within open decision-making arenas. This view of power is very limited. It ignores the power that dominant groups have to keep other groups from being able to participate. It does not view that non-participation or inaction on the part of so many groups in society is a political and social problem.

In the second-dimension, power is harder to observe. Those with the ability to make decisions or influence decision-makers maintain their power by controlling the agenda and determining who are the players. They use their power to keep certain things off the agenda. To understand how power operates at this level, we have to ask: "Who controls the agenda and how do they keep issues off of it?" Powerful interests have the power to

exclude. The power relationship at this level can be described as: *Smith blocks Joan's attempts to get her interests addressed by controlling the agenda. Smith has power over Joan because Smith keeps Joan from getting heard.*

The third dimension is the most hidden or least observable dimension at which power is exercised. It refers to the power to keep marginalized groups from being able to say what their own interests are. The status quo and its attendant power relations are maintained through the power to shape marginalized group's understanding of the world in ways that prevent them from asking questions or seeing any possibilities for real change. Beyond keeping things off of the agenda, at this level, *Smith has power over Joan by influencing and shaping what Joan thinks she wants*. The way power works at this level helps explain why marginalsized groups seem to accept inequality and oppression in a society that claims to be a democracy. It is crucial here to understand is that the third dimension analysis of patterns on non-participation will involve a focus on the social legitimations developed around dominant groups, and instilled as beliefs in the powerless.

To a certain degree, the approach to power that has developed out of the combination of the first-dimensional approach and local experiences of participatory development 'blames the victim' for her non-participation. While there is no explicit statement that women are responsible for their inferior position within society this position has been tacitly accepted. Hence it is hoped that by changing the victim, through basic adult education and basic skill training, patterns of non-participation will also be changed.

In the second-dimension of power, non-participation is symptomatic of the suppression of alternative situations that embody the needs of the mariginalized. As Schattschnieder writes, 'It is not necessarily true that people wit the greatest needs participate in politics most actively-whoever decides what game is about also decides who gets in the game' (in Gaventa, p.9). Going beyond the first dimension, in which power is exercised upon individuals within the decision-making process, the second-dimension allows for the exercising of power in the exclusion of certain participants and issues from the decision-making process. This process may be termed as 'mobilisation of bias' also defined as

rules of the game. This process prevents the surfacing of issues and actors deemed unsuitable to the dominant group. Heaven Crawley (1998) writes, "For work to be empowering it must challenge oppression based on any form of social differentiation on which notions of superiority and inferiority have been built historically and maintained b exercising power over others' (p.30).

Given that the second-dimensional approach does not presuppose an open decision-making arena, and in fact posits that the dominant group has the ability to manipulate decision-making, the investigation of women's non-participation must focus more on 'who gets left out and how', than on 'who gets what, when and how' (Bachrach and aNaratz,in Gaventa, p.9). Power, and its use or abuse, is emphasized in the explanations of patterns of participation or non-participation. A dominant group's reputation for power may be more important both in the control of subordinate groups and in the prevention of political action by those groups than the direct application of that power. This phenomenon, although not fully operationalized, has been recognized by AKRSP and in the canon of participatory literature (Bass et al, p.28; Crawley, p.29; Humble, p.43). Indeed, it is men's reputation of power in Baltistan, conceptualized as 'the danger of backlash', that has paralyzed much of AKRSPs work in the field of gender relations (Gloecker, 1999, p.5). Furthermore, the dominant group will not only seek to prevail in a struggle against weaker rivals, but more importantly it will seek to predetermine the agenda of that struggle-to decide whether certain questions eve reach the competition stage. Joan Mencher (1993) in her study on the sexual division of labor in Kerala and the Philippines found patterns of women's participation and non-participation to be related to their vulnerability to, and fear of, local power elites. Morag Humble (1998), discussing the benefits of using PRA to implement strategic changes[3] in women's subordinate position, writes that, 'women may resist social change in their current position if they feel it may threaten their short-term practical interests or threaten their safety without immediate protection or compensation' (p.36). Developing Humble' argument, it appears

[3] Strategic gender interests are essentially structural, and if changed the actual nature of gender relations would be altered. Practical interests on the other hand 'arise a reaction to the real situation of gender difference', for example the need for women to have greater access to labor-saving devices (Turbyne, p.63).

that patterns of non-participation among women are not derived from traditional and cultural norms, but rather they vary according to their relation to the power field that surrounds them.

With its emphasis on observable conflict, the first dimension power may be understood as who prevails in bargaining over the resolution of key issues. The mechanisms of power in this approach are relatively straightforward. Political resources, such as votes and influence, are used by political actors in both the dominant and subordinate group, and both the magnitude of individual's political power and efficacy with which it is wielded determine the outcome of the contest. The second dimension adds to this the idea of the mobilisation of bias, which may be wielded in the decision-making arena. The mobilisation of bias itself is sustained by 'non-decisions', as defined as:

> *A decision that results in suppression of thwarting of a latent or manifest challenge to the values or interests of the decision maker. To be more nearly explicit, nondecision-making is a means by which demands for change in the existing allocation of benefits and privileges in the community can be suffocated before they are voiced, or kept covert; or killed before they gain access to the relevant decision-making arena; or, failing all of these things, maimed or destroyed in the decision implementing stage of the policy process.*
>
> (Bachrach and Baratz, in Gaventa, p. 14)

One form of non-decision-making may be force. For example, Akhila Ghohsh's experience with CENDIT in India, in using participatory video to raise women's awareness: '....CENDIT encountered outright hostility from who felt threatened by the video production that their wives were involved with. Some women were beaten and not allowed to participate' (in Protz, 1998, p. 174). A second may be the threat of sanctions. Third, and perhaps most important is the invocation and manipulation of extant symbols and ideologies to deflect and defeat incipient challenge. As Cornwall (1998) describes:

> *Those who step outside the kind of behaviour that is valued within mainstream culture may find themselves labelled and discriminated against... those [men] who fail to conform with dominant models of masculinity... are treated with disdain by other men and women.* (Cornwall, p. 51)

The third dimension of power is the realm of the ideological processes that militate to present action being taken by the marginalized group to change their situation. The dominant may not only prevail over the dominated in second dimension of power, by

shaping the agenda of struggle, but they may also be able to manipulate and mold the marginalized group's conception of the issues. Crawley (1998) expresses this position when she writes that, 'Powerlessness not only impedes the powerless from articulating their demands, it also often makes acting on those demands unimaginable' (p. 32). While the two-dimensional approach suggests that barriers exist that prevent issues from emerging into the political arena, and hence constrain conflict, the third dimension posits that through the shaping of patterns and conceptions of non-conflict power is used to pre-empt the emergence of conflict in the first place. As such, the deployment of the pre-emptory aspects of power may happen in the absence of observable conflict, although there must exist latent conflict, which consists of 'a contradiction between the interest of those exercising power and the real interests of those they exclude' (Lukes, in Gaventa p. 12). By avoiding the individualistic and behavioral confines of the first dimension, the third dimension allows for consideration, both of the ways in which potential issues are kept off the political playing field, as well as what Crawley (1998) suggests as the role of ideological predominance in 'internalized oppression' (p.26).

The mechanism of power that operate in the third dimension are present in the literature, albeit in an embryonic or atomised way. Since the third dimension functions at the level of ideology it would be necessary to investigate the ways in which power informs the conceptions of the necessities, possibilities, and strategies of challenge in situations of latent conflict. As with the second dimension symbols play a central role, but so too do social myths. Joan Mencher (1993) describes, though unfortunately does not analyze, the role of social myths in maintaining gender division of labor in Kerala,

> *.... women claimed that because ploughing has to be dome with sanctity, or by those who are sacred, only men can plough. It is clear that they are not discussing physical strength, but rather the belief that those who menstruate pollute the earth.* (Mencher, p.104)

A third dimension analysis of patterns of non-participation will involve a focus on the social legitimations developed around the dominant, and instilled as beliefs in the powerless, inshore, it will require a focus on what Foucault calls 'the false power of hegemonic knowledge', location the power processes that get the marginalized to act and

believe in a way that they otherwise might not, to the benefit of the dominant and to the detriment of the subordinate. Kate Young (1997) introduces the psychological facet of the third dimension when, following Amartya Sen, she argues that,

> *....a number of forces that have conspired against women's bargaining position over time and that the asymmetries that develop are sustained. Thus the relative weakness of women in....conflict in one period tends to* [reinforce] *their relative weakness in the next period.* (Young, p. 155)

What has been expressed here is the idea that continual defeat of the powerless by the dominant can change the conceptions of the powerless regarding the possibility of socio-political change, leading to the expression of fatalism by the powerless. This psychological face of power suggests the possibility that linkages exist between the different dimensions of power. If the victories of the dominant group in the first-dimension lead to the non-challenge of the marginalized out of fear or reprisals, as in th second-dimensional case, the calculated non-participation of the marginalized may, over time, lead to an unconscious patterning of withdrawal, maintained not by the fear of the dominant, but by a sense of powerlessness within the marginalized group. Alternatively, the marginalized may act, but owing to their sense of powerlessness they may change the level of their demands.

This aspect of powerlessness is particularly important both in its implications for participation theory, as well as for its application in AKRSPs program area. For Judith Turbyne (1996) participation is essentially and educative process, in which the political system would determine the attitudes and behaviour of those invloved in the particular system (p. 37). If Turbyne's analysis is correct, then those who are denied participation might not develop a political consciousness of their situation or of broader political inequalities. Given the limited nature of women's participation in Baltistan this will be critical avenue of investigation. In Freire's 'closed societies', where the marginalized are hightly dependent on the dominant group, the powerless are denied the dialectic of self-determined action and reflection upon those actions. Friere's argument follows that, denied this process and denied a democratic experience out of which develops a critical consciousness, they develop a 'culture of silence'. The 'culture of silence' may preclude

the formation of consciousness among the dispossessed and give to the dominant an air of legitimacy. Furthermore, the sense of powerlessness may lead to an internalization of the roles and values ascribed to the marginalized by the dominant. This is not to say that challenge cannot emerge, but the initial demands of the subordinate group are likely to be poorly formed and ambiguous. As long as elements of the sense of powerlessness, can be maintained, then although there may be multitude of grievances, the 'critical consciousness' required for action may be forestalled. Gramscian theory argues that ontological contradictions brought about by powerlessness will prevent challenge from emerging, and even as consciousness emerges it may be vulnerable to, and molded by, the power field that surrounds it. Humble's (1998) observation that due to numerous societal cleavage patterns, 'women may more readily recognize interests they share with men of their own social group...than any they share with women from another group' suggests that the powerful may be able to channel the emergence of challenge into non-threatening arenas (p. 36). A consistently expressed consensus is not required for the maintenance of the status quo, only a consistency that certain key issues remain latent and other remain unrecognized.

As has already been stated, linkages exist between the first two dimensions of power and the indirect processes of the third. From the perspective it will be possible to examine te impact of power relations in all three dimensions in women's non-participation as a holistic and inter-related unit. Power serves both to allow the dominant group to prevail over the subordinate in the resolution of manifest conflict and to affect the conceptions of the powerless abut the nature of conflict, if, in the perceptions o the superordinate group, the interest so the dominant and subordinate are seen to be contrary, and the dominant group exercises power in the protection of its perceived interests then it will in their advantage to wield power in such a way that the quiescence and non-challenge of the subordinate group will be generated and maintained. From this thesis emerges Sen and Young's argument that power and powerlessness are accumulative over time and that the various forms of power serve to reinforce each other (Young, p.155).

As a group develops power and assumes a position of dominance, it will prevail over a less powerful group (or groups) in the allocation of resources within decision- making arenas. Consistent defeat of the subordinate group by the dominant allows the accumulation of political resources by the dominant, resources they may used in the construction of barriers around decision-making fora and in the creation of a 'mobilisation of bias'. The predominance of the superordinate group in the decision-making arena of the first dimension, together with the thwarting of challenges to its position in the second dimension, may allow for the creation and maintenance of symbols and legitimations of its power. The dominant group's power in the first dimension augments its power to affect the actions of the subordinate in the second dimension, which in turn develops the power to affect the subordinate group's conceptions of the issues in the third.

Further strengthening the power of the dominant is the fact that the powerlessness of the subordinate group is similarly accumulative. Indeed, power and powerlessness are mutually reinforcing towards the generation of the subordinate's quiescence. The constant defeat of the subordinate group by the dominant in the first dimension, may lead to the patterning of non-challenge among the subordinate group due to the anticipation of defeat by the dominant group. Yet the withdrawal of the subordinate group affords opportunities to the dominant group to further consolidate its position and ensure the future exclusion of their antagonists from participatory arenas.

> *The inaction of B in the second-dimensional sense becomes a sum of the anticipation by B of defeat and the barriers maintained by A over B's entering the decision-making arena anyway, and the reinforcing effect of one upon the other.*
> (Gaventa, 1982, p.22)

Within the subordinate group, the second-dimensional relationship may reinforce aspects of powerlessness within the third, such as political withdrawal and split consciousness. Continued non-challenge by the subordinate group, due to an internal sense of inefficacy rather than the direct exercise of power by the dominant, will allow the further development of legitimations and ideologies to control and affect the subordinate group's conceptions. In turn, the sustained powerlessness of the subordinate group may take it

more susceptible to the ideology of dominance prescribed by the superordinate. In a third-dimensional case, then, the subordinate group's response is the sum of its own powerlessness and the dominant group's power, and the mutually reinforcing interrelation between the two.

Once such power relationships are developed, they maintained by their own inertia, and change becomes difficult. For the subordinate to effect a beneficial shift in the power relation, not only does this group have to act to overcome the dominant group's power, but it also has to overcome its own deeply instilled sense of powerlessness. If conflict can be contained within the second and third dimensions, the dominant group will be able to maintain its pre-eminent position through the inertia of the situation.

As shock to the power relation[4] may engender the emergence of challenge, either due to a loss in power by the dominant group, or due to a gain in power of the subordinate group[5]. It is the subordinate group's sense of powerlessness, rather than the dominant group's possession of power, which presents the greatest barrier to action. The subordinate group must be able to counter both the direct and indirect effects of power's third dimension, formulating of the needs, possibilities and strategies of challenge is crucial. Overcoming the dominant group's mobilisation of bias requires the development by the subordinate group of both real and symbolic resources with which to wage the challenge. The emergence of action by the subordinate group in first dimension can only be said to reflect genuine participation once the obstacles present in the second and third dimensions are overcome.

Yet even as challenge emerges, there are number of potential pitfalls that may scupper the subordinate's groups to effect positive change in their situation. For the dominant group to intervene in a situation of potential conflict is to introduce the notion of conflict itself. Therefore, if the dominant group is able to remain aloof from the subordinate

[4] This is what Kieffer terms the 'mobilisation event', an event that forces them to re-evaluate their relationship to traditional authority figures and structures (in Turbyne, p. 60).
[5] There need not be a direct correlation between the two. Interventions by third parties, technological factors, and external structural changes can induce a change in group's power.

group, issues may remain unrecognized or latent. Furthermore, the dominant group may, should the subordinate articulate challenge, intervene at any point in the process of issue of emergence. The barriers to change facing the subordinate group are, for the dominant, options for the maintenance of the *status quo*. Yet, as the barricades to the subordinates' participation are broken down, the dominant group's options for control are lessened. As a corollary, the emergence of challenge in one area of a power relation disproportionately weakens the power of the whole to withstand further assaults by the subordinate group. A single success by the subordinate group may alter patterns of inaction by diminishing the anticipation of defeat by the dominant group. Once patterns of quiescence are broken on one set of grievances the resources of challenge may be transferred to other and more important issues, the dominant group's interest, *vis a vis* its position of power, is to maintain the subordination of another group that may present a challenge to its hegemony. The dominant group will act to thwart challenges by the subordinate group, regardless of whether they are directly challenging to their dominance. Once the patterns of quiescence are broken, the likelihood of further action by the subordinate escalates and the opportunities for suppressing this group[6] diminish.

[6] Options for the control of the subordinate group available to the dominant group.

Understanding Gender Issues in Baltistan

A discussion of gender issues in this section will help the reader to understand and reveal how gains in consciousness on the part of women are not straightforwardly developmental, that learning and consciousness-raising are difficult, ambiguous and contested. The story of the WOs in Baltistan illustrates this complexity. In what follows I give an overview of the area and briefly examine the scale and role of AKRSP's Women's Programme in Baltistan. In last sixteen years, AKRSP has introduced many opportunities for women in Baltistan and numerous women have sprouted up both to take advantage and to take on new roles.

About Baltistan: Once a small western district of the Tibetan Empire, Baltistan has now become strategically important Pakistani region in its northern disputed area. The people of the area remained subjugated to the Dogra rule for over a century until the Baltis broke the chains of slavery and in 1948, Baltistan joined Pakistan. The region now forms part of Pakistan as a federally controlled district. This district is divided into five major valleys namely Skardu, Khaplu, Rondu, Kharmang and Shingo-Shigar, India bounds the district to the east and Astore lies to the South, Gilgit is in the west and China in the north. (Area map on page 6).

Baltistan is an area of 25,850 square kilometers in Pakistan's rugged Northern Areas. Its population of 272,000 people live in 234 villages, comprising 32,396 households (AKRSP, 2000). A gender-disaggregated look at the population shows that there are 111,520 men and 160,480 women living in Baltistan: giving a male-female ratio of 0.69 (AKRSP, 2000). The locals speak Balti, an offshoot of Ladakhi that is an extremely archaic Tibetan dialect. Baltistan is situated on the northern side of the Himalayas. Winters are extremely cold and temperatures often fall below freezing point between November and February. The climate in spring and autumn is mild but in July and August, the heat in the sun is very severe although nights are cool and pleasant. The Karakoram Highway connects the area to the rest of the country. Baltistan is also known as the land of peaks, rivers and glaciers. Baltistan is proud of having K-2, the world's

second highest peak, and Baltoro, the world's longest glacier outside the Arctic region. Baltistan has more than forty-five peaks of over 20,000 feet and is known to be the 'mountaineer's paradise.'

AKRSP- Working for a Better World: Aga Khan Rural Support Program's (AKRSP) operations in Baltistan were initiated in 1986 with the objective of providing an enabling environment for rural communities to manage and develop their natural resources in a productive and sustainable manner. From the outset, the organization had outlined a strategy of supporting participatory development processes in villages. A key strategy of AKRSP's approach is social organization: the formulation of male Village Organization (VO), and subsequently Women's Organization (WO), through a process of dialogue with communities. The Village/Women institutions (V/WOs) supported by AKRSP are membership organizations. In Baltistan, V/WOs membership usually encompasses the entire village. All V/WOs have elected representatives, including a management, which is headed by a president. The programmes are based on several principles: participation, equity, cost-effectiveness, and transfer of skills to villagers to equip them to take over the planning and management of the programmes. Technical and financial support to local village institutions and activists is a central strategy.

The broad socio- cultural context: As discussed in the last chapter, over time as patterns of male prevalence had been established within decision-making arenas, power could be wielded more readily over the decision-making agenda itself. Since the formative historical moments, conflict over matters of gender inequality in Baltistan have been contained within the second-and third-established dimensional arenas of power. The aim of this section is to illustrate how the dominant group, in this case men, has established its political hegemony over the subordinate group, it has also developed a supporting ideology to legitimate its position and ensure the acquiescence of the dominated.

During the fieldwork conducted for this study, one of the questions asked to the groups of women in the village was how conflicts were resolved between men and women. The universal answer was that conflicts hardly ever occur in the village and if they do they are resolved harmoniously. To the casual observer, women's cultural silence and a lack of inter-gender conflict in Baltistan can be taken to reflect their consent, an implicit satisfaction with the status quo. However, to understand women's cultural silence, it is more revealing to look at their relationship to the relations of power in which they are immersed.

A Woman's Place: For the majority of people in rural Baltistan, a woman's place has always been in the home. A girl might play with other children, carry water; after reaching puberty, she should stay at home and her friendships should be with girls and women in her own village and later her husband's family. Girls would often be taken out of school if the village did not have any further facility for female education. Their brothers, on the other hand, would be allowed to walk to the next village to school if the same condition prevails.

In much of rural Baltistan, a woman's work is very much what she can do in her home and garden; this is what makes her respectable, and she fights to sustain this state of affairs. Many writers have shown that the idea that 'women's place is in the home' still survives in much of the Northern Areas (Gloeker 1999, Tetlay 1998, p.12, 3). Because being 'in the home' reflects well on the woman, her husband and family, most women who do work in the fields are the very poor. Some Balti women think that they are 'lucky' to be women because it is the men who have to work in the sun. Of course, women and girls still carry wood and water, sometimes for long distances. And where there is no piped water, it makes sense to do the washing at the stream. The stream can be a meeting-place for women, but some women avoid this meeting-place if their men disapprove. In villages across Baltistan, I found differences in the amount of work women did in the fields of the family farm but all women attached great importance to the home and to being in the home.

In terms of the 'occupation' of women there tends to be some differences between women living in and around towns and women living further from the town. In towns like Skardu, women go out to work. Most women who do paid work do so mainly in 'services', from teaching services to offices. The rural areas; differ from the towns, for in the rural areas 'women's work' is in caring for others, in cooking, cleaning, childcare, caring for the sick, carrying water and wood and 'helping' on the farm- all activities given very low status and not recognized as work. But across the Northern Areas, women are associated with the home. In the very different circumstances of a poor household in Shigar, I found 'the house' to be a recurring motif. The woman belonged to the house, the man to 'the street', meaning the male domain of public life. To describe a woman as 'of the house' was very positive; she should stay inside and do the housework, or be in houses of other women, mostly relatives. It is remarkable that women's lives in a big city could resonate so strongly with those of peasant women in Baltistan.

AKRSP and Women's Programme: Prior to AKRSP's involvement in Baltistan the women living in the region had few, if any, opportunities for formal organization, and their activities were seriously restricted by the *purdah* system. Initially, the prototypical Womens' Program (WP) presented by AKRSP was met with considerable resistance by local men. Men roundly criticized WP and its female staff members on the grounds that they were disrespectful to local culture. Women staff members of WP were the recipients of unsolicited correspondence from men who found the idea of women's initiative particularly distasteful. The letters disclosed that women members promoting this idea were setting a bad example for the local women, and were also encouraging licentious behavior among them. Furthermore, the families of these women staff were informed that their daughters were working at AKRSP because they 'enjoyed the company of men' and were indulging in debauched activities with their male colleagues.

The initial interaction was also difficult due to the restrictions placed on women's mobility and with female illiteracy running at 97% in Baltistan there were very few women who were capable of assuming positions of responsibility in WOs. Initially AKRSP's idea of forming of VOs was restricted to men, and extension services aimed at women were to be provided through VOs.

As an assertion of challenge against the extant system of gender relations was made by AKRSP, the unitary nature of male political power was revealed. Issues emerged; decisions taken by the local elite were singular in their protection of vested interests. Recognizing women's incapacity for independent action, AKRSP chose first to gain the permission of the male before initiating the WP in a given village. In addition, this process was also driven by the fear of backlash against the organization itself by local elites if the women were approached without the prior consultation of the men. The formation of WOs has occurred later than VOs, for the reason that in these societies the tolerance for outsiders to work with women on the improvement of their livelihood prospects requires the initial assent of men to the process. As Morton explains:

> *....strong resistance to the program, due to it being affiliated with a particular religious group, necessitated a careful approach, in particular concerning the involvement of female community members.* (Morton, et al., 1999, p. 7).

In accord with the situation, AKRSP began what developed into an intense relationship with men and women from rural settlements in Baltistan. While the WOs to be established gave the women a forum to discuss their issues, it fell under the jurisdiction of the VOs. With the possibility of the co-optation and administration of the WOs by men, it was unlikely that such a women's forum could have posed any threat to male political supremacy. The catalyzing event for the formation of a WO in one village, and indeed for WOs in the whole region occurred mainly from the positive outcomes of contact with AKRSP and from pressures by women who observed AKRSPs packages with positive implications for themselves. One such successful package observed by the WOs was AKRSP's vegetable seed package. Soon a resolution arrived to form a WO in a village by VO. With the formation of one WO in a village other VOs requested the

formation of WOs in their own villages. WOs continued under the jurisdiction of the VOs until 1990, when under pressure from the World Bank AKRSP effected a shift toward the independence of WOs. There was little male resistance to this change.

The religious leaders and Women Organizations: Due to low literacy rates in Baltistan, the 'gatekeeping' of information is the prerogative of local elites, in particular religious leaders. Because of their significance in the social life of the villages, they are able to act as local brokers of information. Their status within Baltistan's rural communities allows them to act in a mediating capacity between the local and extra-local environments. The importance to the local elites of the monopoly over information may be judged by the numerous attempts to suppress alternative interpretations of the WP. One such attempt was made in 1997, when religious leaders of Baltistan became a major oppositional force by issuing *fatwa*[1]. It caused AKRSP to withdraw its support for its extant WO's for fear of 'upsetting the cultural system' and incurring the wrath of local male population. As a result WSOs were pulled back from the field and were asked to stay at their homes for 4 months. In the mean time, AKRSP received many resolutions from the WOs demanding abolition. As a result, 18 WOs were abolished during the year (Farman, 1999, p. 5).

Inspite of such conflict, AKRSP continued to work with the poorest communities, initiating dialogues with the women. They created conditions for working together to identify women's critical priorities and begin to help them seek ways to meet them. With this approach they hoped that it would ensure responsibility for 'solutions' by the women themselves, since they would be the people within communities who would operate them and pass the benefits to others. The process of building this relationship transformed these women and has created the foundation for the educational process of empowerment which is now one of the major activity of AKRSP work in rural communities of Baltistan (AKRSP, 1996). Working with this notion of empowerment, AKRSP wants to ensure women's participation in the organizational arrangements of WOs from the outset.

[1] *Fatwa* may be defined as religious decree

WOs and development: AKRSP had tried to involve women and men equally in the projects it supported. It assumed that 'gender equity' could be attained by 'mainstreaming women', i.e. having WOs with the VOs (men's organizations). AKRSP stressed that atleast one woman per household joins the WO. Furthermore, each WO has an account with the bank. And indeed, women did join and participated in activities such as tree planting, vegetable seed package, management training programs and vocational training. However, participating in such income generating activities did not ensure women's role in decision making. In Baltistan, it is not socially acceptable for women to share a common platform with the men of their village, nor are women expected to speak in a public gathering where men are present. When AKRSP staff encouraged women to attend WO meetings, men automatically assumed the management issues of the WOs and women took the back seat rarely expressing their opinions.

The village men had a simple explanation for women' s limited participation: women can not handle management issues especially money matters as they have inadequate information. According to the men, there was little point in wasting time teaching women about cashbooks, savings registers etc. as they are not capable and are not allowed in the public forum. Initially, this was an easy way out for the predominantly male staff of AKRSP. For them, teaching rural women basic bookkeeping was difficult and time consuming. Particularly in interior Baltistan, the men do not appreciate talking directly with women.

Moreover, due to cultural restrictions placed on women's mobility the women are not fully in control of one of the most important activities of the WO: saving. While the women save their money in a common account, they are reliant on men to deposit their funds in a bank and there have been cases of the non-deposit of money as a form of sanctions against the WO (Farman, 1999, p. 13). From a third-dimensional perspective, men's domination of organizations 'of women, for women and by women' has had broader effects. Seeing men in positions of authority which should be held by women has reinforced in women's minds the prevailing ideology that leadership is 'a prerogative mainly for the male members of the population' (Morton, et al, 1999, p. 18). This inculcation of the superordinate group's notions and stereotypes by the subordinate group

could serve both to augment women's sense of powerlessness, as well as to construct further obstacles to the emergence of challenges.

Although it has been stated in the earlier section that erosion of the edifice of control in any one dimension of power will lead to a weakening of the whole system of domination, this is not always the case. In the first dimension of power, the establishment of WOs did present a challenge to male domination, but AKRSP's intention to keep their activities within traditional and 'culturally sanctioned' lines ensure that no threat would emerge in the second and third dimensions.

It remains evident that AKRSPs social organization strategies for men and women remain different at this stage, entailing different roles and objectives for male and female social organizers. However, it is necessary to be clear on the purpose of forming WOs, which is to assist women's entry into further productive activity not only as a contribution to household income, but also as the basis for their improved social and bargaining influence upon gender relations. Women are socially and culturally more vulnerable in intra-household bargaining, since household patriarchy is re-affirmed by societal patriarchy. Through these organizations AKRSP has given women in Baltistan a forum to voice their issues and grievances that are important to them. With vigorous training in functional numeracy and literacy, and managerial skills, control of men on WOs has shifted. As stated above, the WOs have partially weakened the system of domination in the first dimension. Grievances are articulated in these forums, and action upon these grievances is becoming increasingly prominent. Thus, WOs are slowly and gradually redressing the gender imbalance of the society. Furthermore, with emerging numbers of WOs in the area, there is the opportunity for a wider, deliberate gender dialogue between men and women in the same community (Wood, 1999, p. 26).

Power and consciousness

To paraphrase Paolo Freire: 'The powerless are prevented from either self-determined action or reflection upon their actions' (Freire in Taylor, 1993, p.53). Denied the democratic experience, from which political consciousness can develop, the powerless

instead develop a 'culture of silence.' A community organization like AKRSP is providing women a place to do analysis together, engage in action together and to reflect on their actions. When they are combined, critical thinking and political action can break through the culture of silence. Political consciousness increases political participation and political participation builds political consciousness.

In spite of the historical imbalance of power in Baltistan in which the same few groups (men) control decision-making, agenda setting and meaning, there is a rich history of resistance. Oppressed groups (women) may appear to accept the status quo, but they still have grievances. When women were unorganized, they were not able to articulate those grievances into a set of demands, or a program for social change. In the decades before the AKRSP, when women resisted discrimination and segregation, powerful forces repressed them, so most women learned to live with the status quo. The women organizations that came together with AKRSP gave large numbers of women a way to turn their grievances into demands for social justice. Through analysis, action and reflection, participants developed critical consciousness. They have and are in the process of overcoming their sense of powerlessness. Challenging power along all of these dimensions requires an active, empowered base. This is one reason why building greater participation and leadership through access to learning has become an important agenda for AKRSP in Baltistan.

Building Bonds, Breaking Silence

This section records and analyses educational work undertaken with rural women in Baltistan. It explores how educational work can enable women to break through the silence resulting from continuous subordination. A discussion of gender issues with rural women in this section will help the reader to understand and reveal how gains in consciousness on the part of women are not straightforwardly developmental, that learning and consciousness-raising are difficult, ambiguous and contested.

Methodology

A total of three meetings were held in the month of August 2000, including one review meeting with all the women participants to share the findings. Twenty-five women activists attended the meetings. All of the sessions were held within the village in the house of a WO president. The meetings took place in a community village of Skardu, Baltistan (see map on page 6). The participants ranged in age from twenty-two to sixty years old. Their education levels ranged from no schooling to post-graduate degrees. On average, each session lasted for six hours, with two fifteen-minute breaks for tea and one hour for lunch. Whenever possible the sessions were held in Urdu language, translation was provided by the women participants when Balti was, spoken especially when older women participated.

The meetings were part of an ongoing action research process organized by AKRSP that aimed to develop an awareness of gender issues using participatory qualitative research methods. As a part of participatory research project, we (we' refers to my co-facilitator Nusrat who helped me in this project) used story telling to evoke repressed voices: the recollection and articulation of denied feelings, thoughts and experiences for the purpose of reconstituting the self-esteem of participants. The meetings were informal and covered three main areas: an introduction; uncovering lived experience and feeling through story telling; focussed discussion on status of women. The first meeting with rural women began with attempts to build a level of trust between the participants in order to make the meeting a relatively safe space in which we felt able to talk, reflect, analyze and listen. It

moved very soon into a focus on personal experiences through story-telling exercise, which triggered memories of being subordinated as women. Humor was incorporated when exhaustion and anxieties surfaced in the stories women told. The focussed discussion at the second meeting examined various dimensions of the self and women's sense of themselves. My agenda was to help them validate their conceptions and recognize their feelings in contrast to the negative stereotypes they might have internalized.

Story telling was used as a participatory tool which attempted to commence from the standpoints of the women themselves: their subjectivities, lived experiences and experienced feelings. Story telling is not individual narrative. It takes place with the listening, questioning and reflecting of others. Henley et al. (1984) describes this as collaborative story telling, akin to consciousness-raising in women's groups (Jenkins et al., 1978). One story or comment sparks the reflection for another. It is in this informal conversational mode that connections, meanings and understandings emerge through listening, questioning and reflecting on each other's stories, and it is this process that contributes to the recovery of participants' authentic realities.

The various uses and powers of narratives have been well-documented (Christ, 1979; Buker, 1987). Story telling has been used as a tool for consciousness-raising and mobilization in the women's movement particularly, but also by grass roots organizations and development agencies. Within feminist discourse, voice and speech are metaphors for women's self-definitions (Collins, 1990), countervailing the construction of others.

Cautionary notes have been sounded, however. Razack (1993) points the need to pay attention to the context in which we hear and tell stories, in particular the effects of the different subject positions of teller and listener. Similarly, Spivak (1990) calls for 'unlearning privilege', meaning that older women activists need to become able not only to listen to 'that other constituency', but also to speak in such a way that they can be heard and taken seriously.

A number of other guidelines were note-worthy in story telling. Ellsworth (1989) advises facilitators to include opportunities for social interaction in their programmes in order to build trust and reduce risk and fear. She further warns against silencing of diversity and argues for the need to take the initiative in learning about others' realities, rather than simply relying on them to inform us. Feminist pedagogy in general stresses that how we hear and speak (process) is as important as what we hear and tell (content).

The usefulness of all women groups as vehicles for active, experiential learning is also well established (Aries, 1976). He further notes that women prefer all-female groups, feeling more restricted in mixed groups, while others point the advantage of the role models provided by women in all-female groups. For my part, I have found participation is maximized in all-women groups and that they help women gain courage to speak and confidence to do things.

The above noted insights both provided a frame and informed the process of my research with rural women of Baltistan. All-women meetings were participatory and were the means to 'elicit talk'. However, facilitation was necessary not only to evoke repressed thoughts and feelings, but also to help make sense of them.

In this section I have tried to explain my views on subordination of women, sometimes using what other academics say- but what really matters in the end is 'what the actors in the situation think'. The section of this chapter which follows illustrate how participatory methods bring resistance to the surface and promote conflict and change. I argue that as educators we have to support and work constructively with such moments of discomfort. The core of these meetings-the 'elicited talk'- is described in the following section.

Some Long Talks with Balti Women

An understanding of the contradictory and patriarchal ideologies underpinning Balti women is important, because the ambiguities and contradictions in these ideologies helped to shape their members' political learning. As we will see below, women in this workshop increasingly came to critique patriarchal ideas and practices to assert equal

opportunities for themselves. The material presented below is very sensitive, and in this section when I quote from individual, I shall use categories (women 1, 2, 3 or young woman, old woman etc.) rather than even fictitious names. All had the courage to express critical understanding of the topic. My role at the meeting was to run the focus group as I found it important to listen to women who seek support in the WOs of rural women.

The purpose of story telling in this meeting was an attempt to highlight women's satisfaction with the *status quo,* it was thought that their conceptions of being women's would reflect any grievance with the extant gender power relations. Feeling of powerlessness was the recurrent theme in the narratives of women participants. They spoke of social stigmas, hardships, oppressive relationships, discrimination in the family, husband's demands etc. phrases such as, *'there is no importance of women in the society'* and '*being a woman is a problem'*. Even the birth of a daughter is not considered 'good luck' were common. One woman remarked that, *'I am not pleased at all with being a woman. I am even ready to become a man and start dressing like them'*.

Discontent

Having explained the problems that women face, one woman stated that, ' *as women we are proud of cleaning our homes, looking after our animals, improving our income, and doing work in the fields'*. While this may illustrate a degree of satisfaction, what she went on to say is more telling*: those who do not work at home are not entitled to be called women.* In uttering these words this woman has invoked a traditional and legitimate image of a woman that would act in preventing the emergence of challenge of male dominance for fear of ridicule, or worse, by both men and women alike. One women remarked that, *'I like working more and not seeing any suffering from too much work'*, even though women in the village work an average of seventeen hours per day. Another woman in the same room stated that, '*...everybody in the village knows what a great workload I have, but I like it. My husband must be free to earn money.*' One could conceivably argue that any rational woman would choose to take on more work if there was a chance that her husband could earn more money for the family. Conversely, due to the prior role of male coercion the woman's choice represents the only option available to

her. Both approaches to the woman's statement are too simple, while coercion is a component of the process of consensus shaping, *'when used to an extreme it can have negative effects (e.g. resistance)'* (Gaventa, 1982, p.63). The 'rational woman' approach is also problematic in that rationality is a socially bound concept. It is suggested that the power which has informed the woman's conception of the issue of the gender division of labor, is more subtle,

> *[it is power] which shapes the outcome of 'choice' while allowing the chooser to believe that, infact, a choice has been made.* (Gaventa, 1982, p. 63)

The imposition of 'choice' on the subordinate group is a result of the shaping of this group's wants by the dominant faction. In Baltistan, the gender division of labor is defined primarily through physical attributes: man is strong, woman is weak (Warrington and Sadaf, 1996). This conception of the division of labor has partially legitimated men's position as the sole inhabitants of the public sphere, since historically the tasks performed in this arena consisted of physical labor. There also exists an ideology that maintains that because women bear children, they are more skilled in raising them. With the development of this ideology came a partial accommodation of the wants of the subordinate group. While the *purdah*[1] system does not allow women to travel outside the village without *mahram*[2], ' *Women can do any type of work within the village*' (woman: Baltistan). Women do not have decision-making power at the community level, but when asked women were careful to point out that they did have decision-making power within their households. In addition, the honor-shame complex, which links family honor to female virtue, places women in a particularly vulnerable position, yet women themselves conceive of this phenomenon in a positive light (Moghadan, 1993, p. 222). One woman said that she liked being a woman because she was *'the modesty of our parents and brothers'*, many of women seated around her nodded in assent. The assertion of male dominance brought with it an ideological degradation of women that is still highly visible in the region. One woman confidently sated that, ' *my husband says that one man is equal to two women. Therefore, we are not equals'*. One woman echoed this sentiment when she simply said, *'my father says women are useless'*. While trying to explain why women

[1] Purdah maybe defined as the veiling of women in Islam.
[2] A close male relative providing escort.

cannot leave the village without *mahram*, elderly woman proclaimed that it was because, '*women are backward and not mature*'.

Glorification of one sex together with the degradation of the other could combine with the ideology of intra-village openness to help ensure a 'choice' by women to pursue the values prescribed by the dominant group. The coherent and shaping effect of this system can bee seen by comparing the following statements, the first made by a young woman in the group, the second by an elderly woman.

> *Women can do men's work, within the village we can do any work we want.*
>
> *Women cannot do men's work. It is impossible. If a woman tried to drive a tractor it would be very shameful, this sort of thing is not in our culture, we must follow purdah.*

While the young woman's comment might be a reflection of her aspirations, an implicit articulation of challenge, to me it suggests another explanation. A high degree of internalization of dominant images by the women in the meeting should foreclose on the emergence of challenge. What the young woman is articulating in the above quotation is the instilled belief that women can do whatever work they so choose, as long as they stay within the confines of the village. The older woman's comment, on the other hand, reflects the rather starker reality of the situation. As Rana Rizvi (1999) writes, lamenting the state of gender relations in Pakistan as a whole, 'Most women have no right to live according to their choice'(p. 47).

During the discussion there was a strong awareness of the role of the dominant ideological discourses in shaping gender relations. Of the twenty-five women, five women were the most outspoken in criticizing existing gender-relations:

Woman 1: *when my husband was working he was not even ready to make a cup of tea, and he said, 'what's the use of women'. Men think that the purpose of marriage and having a woman at home is to have a cook and a cleaner.*

Woman 2: *women are always considered inferior to men.*

Woman 3: *yes, men always have the upper hand, there is no exception. Even in death.*[3]

[3] Traditionally in baltistan women are buried two feet deeper than men.

Woman 4: *my husband gets angry when I go to the WO meetings. He warned me I if keep going he will kick me out of the house.*

Woman 5: *There is no importance of women in the society.*

The above comments are indicative of a developing consciousness around women's subordination; there has been a realization among some women of their inferior social status (women 1 &2). The comments made by women 4 & 5 show a nascent understanding of the dominant ideologies that guarantee women's inferior position. Yet even women with so much manifest frustration expressed seemingly contradictory ideas. While dissatisfaction with the prevailing social environment was articulated, the women in the meetings did not wish to see change in areas which they deem to be theirs. While they criticized the restriction placed on their movement and the burden of work they have to perform, they were unwilling to surrender certain tasks to men: '*Cooking food, cleaning the house and feeling the animals, washing the dishes and the clothes, it will be very difficult for the men*'. Objectively these tasks would not be hard for men to perform, yet the gender division of labor has not been rejected by the women, in fact it is highly internalized. John Gaventa (1982, p. 19) writes that ' *even as the [political] silence is broken [by the subordinate group], the initial demands of the dominated may be vague, ambiguous, partially developed*'. As long as elements of the sense of powerlessness or the accompanying consciousness that grows from non-participation can be maintained, then although there may be a multitude of grievances, the critical consciousness required for action on grievances is likely to remain precluded.

All the women present expressed grievance concerning the societal position of women but there is little to indicate that the women in these villages have gone beyond articulation into organized action, or further developed consciousness of their situation. Observing and listening to the women making courageous comments I intuitively expected to find the green shoots of challenge, but found none. What are the processes and mechanisms deployed by the dominant group to stifle the emergence of challenge?

Social Order

The institution of marriage, as discussed in the meetings, offers another resource of the dominant group for the subordination of women in Baltistan. Early marriages, early and recurrent pregnancies, as well as a supporting ideology that stresses the benefits of early marriage and reinforces women's primary role as childcare-providers serve to diminish the opportunities available to women to challenge the status quo. Similar to the above discussion into the association of social frustration with ideological internalization, there seem to be a similar relationship between women's attitude to marriage and their internalization of dominant ideologies.

When marriage was discussed, most women appeared not only satisfied with the existing system of marriage, they wholeheartedly supported it. Believing early marriage to be conducive of community harmony one woman said that, '*Early marriage is good. It prevents unwanted pregnancies and stops the girl from fooling around with other boys in the village*'. The woman's statement indicates that early marriage and pregnancy is expected of a woman. There are further two points for which this woman's statement is notable. First, it is an explicit articulation of the ideology that supports early marriage, the idea that women have no control over their sexuality and are a constant temptation to the obviously self-controlled male population and that they need to be controlled by men. Valentine Moghadan (1993, p. 223) has observed that, 'In contemporary Muslim patriarchal societies, such control over women [brought about my early marriage] is considered necessary…because women are regarded as the potential source of *fitna*, that is, moral disorder and anarchy'. Second, it is confounding that woman would prescribe a system that has denied her, and will deny others, many opportunities. The depth of this woman's internalization of the dominant ideology is probably the best, as well as the correct, explanation for the woman's statement.

One woman who displayed the most manifest frustration with the status quo lamented the institution of marriage in its existing form. The recurrent factors were-early marriages and social pressure to produce a child. There is enormous social pressure on newlyweds

to produce a child within one year of marriage; the husband must prove his manliness and, in particular, the wife must prove that she is not barren.

> *There is social pressure on the women, as well as on the husband, to have child within one year of marriage, if the woman does not have a child soon after marriage there is much pressure from the in-laws and relatives. They can make the woman's life miserable... if they do not produce a child the villagers will start thinking that the woman is barren. This will be bad for the family* (woman participant).

The combination of these two factors not only put the young wife at great health risk, but they also conspire to eliminate her as an effective socio-political agent. Accentuating this problem is the fact that women are socialized to put themselves and their health last. Although only talking about eating, one woman said, *'if there is an invitation, men are always preferred, they are always offered food first. All the delicious food is presented to them: eggs, chicken and all other delicious food'*. It is reasonable to assume that women's secondary position extends into other arena, in particular that of health care.

Another factor regarding marriage and pregnancy that sprung during the conversation that adds to women's further insecurity in home is not just whether they can bear children, but whether they can bear the *right* child. In Baltistan, as in many parts of the developing world, boys are preferred over girls as children. Kate Young (1997, p. 135) has found evidence '*that women are chronically under-resourced relative to men in many poor households. Studies show that even within better-off households, daughters are often physically impaired because they receive a smaller share of resources than sons do'*. To put this quotation into the language of local village women, '*the men do not provide hot water to wash the baby if it's a girls, but if it is a son they hold ceremonies'* (woman). The implications of son-preference for the mother and the wife are that the husband and the family blame her for not being able to have a son.

Woman 1: *Even the birth of a daughter is considered bad luck*

Woman 2: *The husbands are angry at the birth of more than one girl, some husbands warn their wives that if they don't give birth to a son next time they will be kicked out of the house.*

While the woman present in the discussion seem to be aware of the fact that they have no way of choosing the sex of their child. It seems to be a fact that has flown over the heads of multitude of men in Baltistan. A woman stated, '*children are God-gifted, we have no right to like or dislike them because of their gender*'.

Education

Over and over again during the discussion, it was found that the women's greatest regret was a lack of schooling and education.

Woman 1: *without education or literacy we are not proud of being women.*
Women 2: *the biggest problem in the village is a lack of girl's school.*
Women 3: *we don't like being uneducated.*

A further consequence of early marriage is that even if a young girl is able to juggle her schoolwork and her household chores, a possibility over which must be cast serious doubt, the triple weight of marriage, pregnancy and childcare will finish any hopes she might have had (UN, 1996, p.147). Simply put, it is also impossible for girl to continue attending school after marriage, in part because of *purdah* but more important is the fact that the girls is now responsible for the performance of reproductive tasks within the household. When discussing effects of early marriage and pregnancy on education one woman simply replied, '*we can get permission from our husbands to continue our education*'. Even if women are given a choice to continue schooling and this permission is given, then who will perform the household chores and look after the children? The fact remains that advent of pregnancy within one year of marriage, and well before the end of secondary school, hammers the final nail into the coffin of women's education.

It was found in through the responses of women that women resisted a redistribution of activities in the gender division of labor. It was observed during the discussion that women did not believe that men had the necessary competencies to do their work. In response to my co-facilitator's question, one woman said that '*we do not allow them to our tasks, nor do they do them*'. Another woman added '*as woman we are suppose to do our house chores not them*'. This statement represents a mobilization of bias around the

dominant and legitimate image of what a woman is, that is women are defined as those people who work at home.

The socializing of both girls and boys to believe that only women can raise children is another obstacle to women's continuation of school after marriage and pregnancy. One woman clearly articulated this social myth when she said, *'it will be very difficult for men to do women's work, especially taking care of children. They cannot tolerate the noise and mischief'*. The foundation for this ideology is the belief that,

> *Women have a special ability to look after their children because of their maternal nature, men do not share this attribute and cannot look after their children correctly.*
>
> (Woman participant)

However, the above discussion on women's marriage and education discloses that even if women want to continue school after marriage or avoid pregnancy the most successful deployment of ideology will restrict this from ever becoming a contestable issue. The childhood socialization of girls into a position of subordination not only affects their conceptions on the valuation of education and marriage, but also on matters of wider significance.

The similar 'pervasive powerlessness' of the vast majority of women in Baltistan has had similar effects. The frustration of women with the social order has had been documented above in the sections, but the most notable statement from the group was, *'I think the values that force us to act a certain way are men's values, and we are forced to follow them'*. This statement is notable for number of reasons. First, the women are cognizant of the fact that rather than being free from interference, the life choice they take are informed by the imposition of dominant values and ideologies that are not necessarily in harmony with their best interest. Second, the statement shows an inchoate understanding of the mechanism of power that forces the women to behave in a certain way.

Though the research discussed above yielded substantial insights, it was only a small window into the large issue of how to surface and address women's experienced subordination in ways that are empowering. The emphasis on the discussions was largely

on getting the women to talk and express their feelings, and consciousness-raising must go beyond this to engage analysis and formulation of a vision and strategy for change.

Women meetings: Site of Struggle, Site of Learning

What, then, can be concluded about the nature of informal learning in the above discussions? First, women's reflections on their experiences and learnings in the discussion show that they were wrestling with what Gaventa (1982) see as the central contradiction of social life, the way in which

> *A sense of powerlessness may manifest itself as extensive futalism, self-depreciation, or undue apathy about one's situation. Katznelson has argued....that "given the onus of choice [between challenge and silence], the powerless internalize their impossible situation and internalize their guilt...The slave often identified with his master and accepted society's estimated of himself as being without worth.* (p. 17).

There was an implicit recognition of this dilemma in the women's reflection. Recalling the experience of women in the meetings, one woman felt that:

> *I am sorry for being a woman because I have no education....my husband does not respect me because I am uneducated.*

When the women talked about what they had learned from working in and being involved with the discussions, they talked about learning and changing in a variety of ways. In essence, they reported learning new skills and gaining a new sense of themselves and what they might do in their lives. Many of the women participating in the discussions had received different kinds of training, usually through Women Organizations. Few of them had secular education from school or college. All of them had positive experiences about training and considered learning more than mere lesson in school. Important to them was to have an opportunity to be with other women and feeling the support. For them community based training and meetings was experienced as empowering, as was getting out of their homes and being recognized as learners.

Secondly, the process of the meetings reported here suggest that it can be seen as 'liberated spaces' in which women have opportunities to explore their life experiences and build women-centered relationships. Through participating in the meetings, women gain instrumental skills and knowledge, as well as self-awareness and an understanding

of the complexity of interpersonal relationships. The women also learn that wider contextual and structural factor shape what happens in the society. Much of this learning is informal, incidental and embedded in other activities. It is often not articulated as learning by the people who do it, but it is still significant learning.

The meetings can also be seen as site of struggle, and the struggles themselves providing opportunities for learning. These struggles were with one's self, against one's own sex-role socialization. So, for example, the women at the meeting had to overcome the belief that they are not just 'workers' as stated earlier in the meeting where one woman said, '*If you ask us who we are and how we define ourselves, we say 'workers,' that's the first way we measure ourselves and I think I don't do anything.*' At one and the same time, they don't recognize the work they do and they know they're hard at it all day. The biggest challenge for us during the meetings was to let women realize that they can do things, have choices, can throw off the old fears. It was exciting to see rural women's new capacities '*to feel safe in front of others*' and, more positively, '*to be able to explain what they think*'.

Debates in the meetings also generated struggles between individuals and groups. So, at the meetings, there was a decisive debate over role of women between older and younger women, and there was a difficult and painful struggle over younger women's demand for equality with men at the household and village level. While older women recognizing the need for equality persisted on saying that ' *don't be beghairat*[4] *and spoil the community's harmony. You should be thankful to your husband's for allowing you to come here*'. Such struggles have the potential to be destructive and debilitating. But they can also lead to decisive, liberating, action, which itself is full of learning for the people involved. For example, the struggle over 'being a woman' helped to create a close, strong, committed group of learners.

[4] Beghairat is a derogatory word used to describe a person, usually a woman, of debased morality.

This is learning that enables people to make sense of, and act on, their environment, and come to understand themselves as knowledge-creating, acting beings. Through their participation in various discussions, women have learned to overcome the fear and lack of confidence instilled in them by their gender socialization, to fight for something for themselves and to participate in collective decision-making. All this is clearly critical learning: it involves the de-privatization of previously apparently idiosyncratic experience, the completion of understandings, the opening up of possibilities for action, and changes in 'the structure and the frame of experience' (Hart, 1990, p. 66-67). The process of critical learning involved during the discussions allowed women to theorize their experience: they stood back from it and reorder it, using concepts like power, choice, conflict. It is also clear that this critical learning was gained informally, through activities and story telling, by acting and reflecting on action, rather than in formal courses.

My aim in this discussion was to provide an environment in which women can reflect on this whole matter of power relations, unpacking those aspects imposed by society and examining how they preserve such imposed identity in themselves, as well as in other women. More specifically, my aim was to enable women to realize that they have the power to reclaim their own self.

As to my role as a facilitator, I try to work with women's personal experience rather than cognitive faculties. In the meetings I tried to take into account women's lack of emotional well-being, lack of personal power and the disempowering experiences that have disabled them. Through the Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) tool of 'story telling' I tried to bring out the internalized stereotypes, myths, feelings and beliefs which numb the agency of individuals. My purpose was to generate learning from daily experiences to aid in the necessary processes of self-validation and self-recovery.

I was aware of reluctance and passivity among the women, aware of the existence of a wealth of unspoken feelings, thoughts and experiences among them, but I did not know what to do with them. The 'negative' emotions that surfaced during story telling exercise

left me frozen and feeble. I feared that dealing with personal dimensions might promote individualism and self-centeredness. I assumed that women would develop skills as a result of active participation in WOs, and that in due course they would overcome passivity and silence.

However, my work is now informed by an understanding of the centrality of emotion. The initial hunch about the transformative potential of emotions, derived from practical knowledge, was affirmed by exposure to Jaggar's (1992, p. 386) description of emotion as an epistemological foundation of women's knowledge, and became increasingly familiar with feminist therapeutic approaches, particularly the attention given to the 'negative' emotions. Lorde (1984, 125-126) helped me to understand the role of anger in problematizing the incongruity between lived experience and sanctioned interpretations of that experience. I learned to channel anger so that it can energize oppressed people to work for social change.

Thus fortified, I continue to explore how interactive, reflective talking can lead to an experience of release and of being able to make sense of emotional responses to the experience of subordination. I am convinced that it is necessary to include experiences emotional subjectivities in our learning agenda if we are serious about fostering empowerment. The emphasis on my part as an educator is to emphasize that women are not only victims of unjust social structures and poverty but also agents of change, whether at the level of making choices in their everyday lives or in organized action aimed at confronting macro-structures.

Exploring Women's World through Men's Eyes

In November 2000, I was given the task by the administration of AKRSP to organize a gender workshop for rural men of Baltistan. I also did this, in response to an identified need from Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), who funds the Social Development Programme in Baltistan. This one-day workshop that I describe below takes place in a community village of Tolti, Kharmang[1], Baltistan (see map on page 6). It is a small example of efforts of AKRSP to plan a process that maximizes the potential for learning and attitudinal change, and thus for increased gender equity for the community women of Baltistan. While the gender workshop encouraged participation across all groups, it paid particular attention to gender issues.

The workshop participants were male community members who were VO (Village Organization) members. The thirty-four participants at the workshop represented a diversity of experience and identities in terms of age, class, formal education and urban or rural background (refer to Table 1 on page 71 for the list of participants).

Aim of the Workshop

The aim of the workshop was to use participatory methods of community development to get a sense of gender issues prevalent in the area. The workshop was an intense experience for all of us. For the purposes of this study, however my reflection on the workshop is intended to explore two important assumptions in my understanding of gender. The first perceives gender as a central dimension of power; that is, in every society, access to power, resources flows and roles are powerfully conditioned by gender.

The second assumption acknowledges, however, that gender is always situated in context. Gender, race, class, culture, language, history are among identities constructed and experienced in interrelation, and each difference makes a difference to the way we experience ourselves and each other.

[1] Kharmang is one of the four valleys of Baltistan

In this section, I will examine the assumptions through an analysis of two central themes. One concerns the extent to which participatory methodologies address social relations. The second involves an analysis of gender in context, which increases our understanding of the dynamics of the community, the existing structures and systems, and their supporting values. Being appointed the gender coordinator for the AKRSP's women's program, I was curious to know: What is the nature of gender relations in the community? What role does gender stereo type play in the existent gender relations? What can I understand from the processes? How do men perceive the gender issue?

Understanding Gender Matters: What is gender?

Non-formal educational practices which aim to challenge injustice and oppression are variously called 'community education', 'education for change', 'people's education', 'emancipatory education' and 'education for empowerment' etc. In recent years, however, the term 'popular education' has gained an international currency among organizers and educators who have been influenced and inspired by the writings of Brazilian educationalist Paulo Freire (1978) and the educational work carried out in Latin American communities over the past three decades. Popular education involves an inherently self-reflective, reflexive and non-dogmatic approach. It works to make space for the collective, participatory production of knowledge of insight, and builds on what emerges from the experiences of those actively participating. Where gender is the focus, the educator is engaged in the process of deconstructing and constructing gender (Gujit & Kaul Shah, 1998, p. 1). Understanding how this happens is essential to practice.

The word 'gender' has been given a very specific meaning, and is being used sociologically or as a conceptual category. According to Bhasin (1986, p.1), gender, in its new incarnation refers to the socio-cultural definition of man and woman, the way societies distinguish men and women and assign them social roles. It is used as an analytical tool to understand social realities with regard to women and men. Bhasin (1986, p.6) further states that every culture has its ways of valuing girls and boys and

assigning them different roles, responses and attributes. All the social and cultural 'packaging' that is done for girls and boys from birth onwards is 'gendering'.

Ann Oakley (1985), who was among the first few feminist scholars to use this concept, says the following, 'Gender is a matter of culture, it refers to the social classification of men and women into 'masculine' and 'feminine' (p. 152). According to Oakley (1985), people are male or female can usually be judged by referring to biological evidence. That they are masculine or feminine cannot be judged in the same way: the criteria are cultural, differing with time and place (p. 153).

Gender shapes the opportunities and constraints that women and men face in securing viable livelihoods and building strong communities across cultural, political, economic and ecological settings. Gender influences the roles and relationships of human beings throughout all dimensions of activity. Therefore, each society plays a role in transforming a male or female into man or a woman, into masculine and feminine, with different qualities, behavior patterns, roles, responsibilities, rights and expectations. Unlike sex, which is biological, the gender identities of women and men are psychologically and socially – which means historically and culturally – determined.

Power and control I see as closely linked in any debate about the relationship between popular education and gender. To understand such relations and learn ways to transform them when they are oppressive becomes a key task for educators of popular education. One route to explore and comprehend this slippery terrain is through rigorous reflection on practice and action. Recognizing that each experience is valued for what it brings, having such an approach has helped me shift my mode of 'having to be right' and wanting to 'do things better next time'. For the purposes of this study, I can say that the educational work addressed in the sections that follow represent 'informal education' in that it is oriented towards transforming gendered power relations and shares the basic methodological principle building analytically and practically upon, the experiential knowledge of the learners themselves.

In the following section I will present a brief outline of the participatory methodologies that we chose for working with the male participants. The section that follows narrates the story of the process of the workshop where I discuss in detail the application of the participatory methods. Finally I will reflect on the learning dimension of the gender workshop for the participants as well as for me.

Methodology in Context: The PRA Approach

I chose to use Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) approach for a number of reasons that our linked to my assumptions about participatory methodologies and about gender as a power relation. As a training and development approach, PRA claims to facilitate 'transcending behavior'. It aims to support the growth of self-esteem by facilitating 'learning events', which encourage people to develop their creative and analytic capacity to identify and solve problems (Sirinivasan in Walters 1996, p. 86). The emphasis is on active 'partnership in development' between community member and outside development agent.

Participatory development methodologies implicitly challenge single 'right' solutions by encouraging multi-vocality and tolerating ambiguity (Slocum in Walters, 1996, p. 85). In other words, these approaches recognize that the question of power is at heart of social process; that there are more than one right answer to every question; that anyone who holds out for only one answer probably has a particular interest in control; that both questions and answers depend on whose voices state and restate a problem we go some way towards changing things.

PRA approach asserts that new solutions to some of the chronic and pernicious problems of gender equality can be facilitated by designing group-learning experiences using materials and activities which encourage people to express their feelings, attitudes and beliefs; by making the unconscious conscious through drawing, mapping, enacting, telling stories, recounting experiences and passing on information; in short, by 'holding

the space' for the greater participation of traditionally marginalized and silences people, women and men.

While not all participatory methodologies attempt to tackle existing social power relations, educators working for social change do so self-consciously. Workshops using participatory methodologies can provide contained venues where participants can explore and confront power relations through practical activities within the training process (Heng,1998).

I followed the PRA outline prepared by Paul Francis of the Overseas Development Group, UK (ODG) for Qualitative Research Methods course conducted for AKRSP staff members in 2000. The workshop was for one day and was preceded by a three-day pre-planning workshop with five of the AKRS staff (two women and three men), which aimed to give them more intensive exposure to the approach and the methods, to test and adapt materials, and to create a team of assistant facilitators who would support the core facilitator (myself) at the workshop. For the workshop itself, we planned to immerse the participants in the creative, investigative, analytical and planning activities.

The issues and themes that emerged during the workshop were various and interlinked. However, for purposes of brevity I will highlight and elaborate on only two: gender and learning in informal education. While gender cannot be separated from other social relationships, for the purposes of this paper struggles around gender will be a dominant focus. As for the informal education question, this was raised in relation to the learning in the workshop in general and brought broader social power relations to the surface.

Choosing our Activities for the Workshop

The activities were selected keeping in view the purpose of the activity which was consciousness raising. Throughout, however, we recognize that there is a need for consciousness-raising in many communities as a foundation for participation. In our workshop we tried to include activities that focus on ways to bring disadvantaged or

excluded groups into decision-making processes (in this case women of Baltistan). The following activities were used as a part of our gender workshop:

Gender Division of Labor:	Used to demonstrate an inequitable division of labor
Gender Myths:	Used as a part of raising consciousness among men about the cultural perception of women
Gender Analysis Activity Profile:	Used for reflection on the role of women in the decision making process.

These activities were adapted to raise awareness about gender in the community. These activities facilitated discussion and an awareness of issues of power relations, access to, and control of available resources. It helped us and the community to see how these issues manifest themselves across the lines of gender. Some of the activities helped in identifying resources and gathering information. These activities facilitated discussion and an awareness of issues of power relations, access to, and control of available resources. It helped us and the community to see how these issues manifest themselves across the lines of gender. Focus group interviews were particularly relevant for participatory research methods.

We adapted particular activities in order to identify the ways to:

- Promote a process of heightened group awareness of the social variables which shape access to and control over resources within a group or community;
- Gather data within a participatory, socially sensitive framework.

How we facilitated the Workshop

Purpose: The purpose explains the value and utility of each activity. These activities adapted were used as a means to start a process.

Materials: Keeping in mind that the literate and non-literate participants were part of the group, the activities suggested markers and papers for the group to draw or list down the data. The activities were conducted in Urdu language.

Time: We estimated the amount of time each activity would require. For some we suggested an hour, even though these activities can be part of a much longer process. Activities sensitive to gender we assumed would require that facilitators to allow more time both to collect disaggregated information and to involve people in a process of reflection and action towards more equitable relations.

Process: Our Focus groups were fairy small discussion groups (4-6 men) led by a facilitator. Focus groups are usually conducted to understand and describe better the range of perspectives in a community through small discussions. Our focus group was single gender. Focus groups can be used for any number of purposes- consciousness-raising, information gathering, analysis, and, in general, any step in a development process. The participants were divided into six focus groups for the day. The participants involved consist of varying age, education, social class and wealth etc., which ensured discussion of a wide variety of perceptions. The facilitators introduced a number of Participatory Rural Appraisal activities (PRA) including flow charts, daily activity charts (showing the gender division of labor) and decision making matrix to the focus groups. The six groups were then given the opportunity to present their key findings to the other groups. (Table 2 on page 72 provides a more detailed look at the day's events).

To ensure uniformity and guard against the tendency to become too involved in the details of using the activity across the groups, the process was explained to each of the facilitators in a checklist form. All the five facilitators were provided monitoring sheets to record their thoughts about the application and validity of the tool as well as their experience with the community members regarding gender issues. These monitoring sheets were then analyzed by myself and results were shared with the group. The reflection section after each tool is the result of the analysis agreed upon by the group

The Workshop

Activity 1: Gender Division of Labor

Time: 60 minutes

Purpose: This activity provided detailed information about the division of labor by gender and its consequences for a household. It helped us clarify why women and men have certain tasks and not others and preferred time use. It worked as a starting point for a more general discussion of gender relations and the position of women.

Materials: We used large sheets of paper and markers. We used appropriate symbols to represent time and different types of work unless written descriptions in local language were possible.

Process:

Step 1: Each of the facilitator asked their group of men to indicate how they spend an average day from the time they get up in the morning to the time they go to sleep. We ask the same about women in their house.

Step 2: The group had a mixture of literate and non-literate men. We then wrote the hours of the day and, next to the appropriate times, filled in women and men's tasks side by side. Symbols were also used by the group to represent dawn, midday and evening.

Step 3: We asked the group to draw the intensity of workload on the sheets of paper. Higher intensity was represented by the height of the curve.

Some discussion questions included:

- What are the most burdensome or difficult tasks of the day for women and for men?
- What task do you wish your wife would help you with?
- Do you think what you and your wife receive as compensation is adequate for the work you do? Why/ why not?

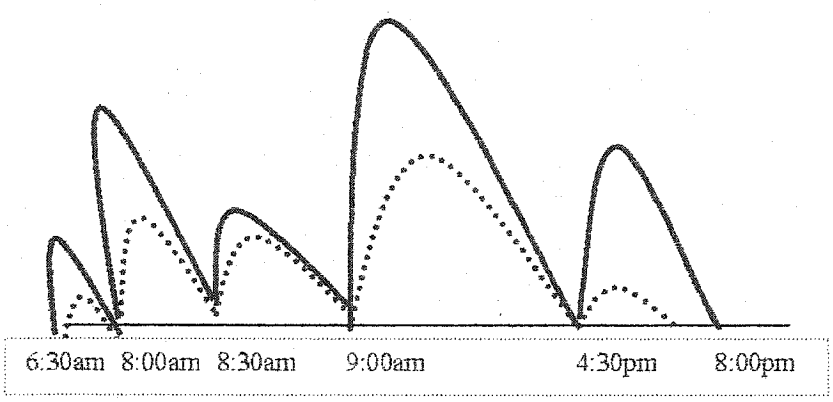
Division of Labor in Tolti, Kharmang

In the PRA exercise in Tolti, Kharmang, the Daily Activity chart revealed that women perform the bulk of the work in the village. The facilitators recorded the information shown in Table 3.

When we met the men, we started by explaining AKRSP's intentions of working with women and that we wanted to know more about women's activities from the men's point of view. I asked them if they could describe the time that women spend on each of their activities during the day. As with most village-based discussion using PRA methods, we suggested that they do the collective analysis on the chart illustrating the intensity of each activity both of their activities. This we thought would allow men to see the issues being discussed more easily, contribute better and reach a shared conclusion.

One man suggested that he would draw with the facilitator the intensity chart of women's chores. The picture was made more visible by putting in both men's and women's intensity of work on the same chart. One literate man helped to show the time by writing numbers and the symbols for other non-literate members.

Figure 1 Women daily activity chart-Intensity



(Here the dotted lines drawn by men represent intensity of men's daily work while the solid line represents that of a woman's)

Table 3 Daily Activity calendar, Tolti, Kharmang

Time	Women	Men
With call to prayer	Wake up, pray	Wake up, pray
6.30-8.00	Break fast, house work	Recite Quran
8.00-8.30	Collect water, cattle shed	Farm/labor work
8.30-9.00	Giving water/fodder, milking cow	Farm/labor work
9.00-12.00	Farm work	Farm/labor work
12.00-1.00	Lunch preparation	Farm/labor work
1.00-2.00	lunch, clean, rest & pray	Farm/labor work
2.00-4.00	Farm work	Farm/labor work
4.00-4.30	Child care	Farm/labor work
4.30-5.00	Tea	tea
5.00-6.00	Dinner preparation	Sit by fire/ socialize
6.00-7.00	Serve dinner	Have dinner
7.00-8.00	Have dinner	TV/ friends/livestock/pray
10.30	Go to bed	

The discussion proceeded, with men identifying tasks and items for each task. They mentioned water collection, cooking breakfast, livestock management in quick succession. I probed each activity further by asking if some activities required the women to carry out other related activities:

Facilitator: what do women usually cook?
Group member: vegetables and meat
Group member2: oh, we forgot to mention the time women spend on vegetable production.
Facilitator: Is that time on top of the farm work?
Group member 3: yes! But just in summer.

When the men felt satisfied that they had identified all the activities, they saw the intensity chart to see the hours of work and the intensity of the work the women do each day. They were astonished to realize that all these activities made women's work day longer than men. Then they became defensive. The men said that woman's work was less difficult and arduous than their own work and men had higher responsibility i.e. earning income for the household. They claimed that cooking, washing and other activities did not involve as much work or stress for the women while their (men's) work has high stress level.

We then probed further referring back to the different tasks and asking them to imagine what women experienced as they undertook each of the tasks. For example, we asked what they think happens to women as they go to collect water. They were silent and we repeated the question, asking if they thought it was an easy task or not, one man started by mentioning that women have to walk long distances often with bare feet. One man mentioned the responsibility women have about children and their upbringing. They all agreed that that is one job of women (looking after children) that they can never do.

The men were quite engrossed as they described the problems that women face in their daily lives and gave many examples. They seemed to realize just how much work is being carried out by women and how strenuous that work actually is. In effect, they were being sensitized to women's situations.

Activity 2: Gender Myths

Time: 60 minutes for each of the six groups of men discussing the myths

Purpose: A gender myth is a legend pertaining to a characteristic of men or women. It can also be an idea or perception that has gained currency in the culture. Myths or stereotypes often enforce gender roles and responsibilities as well as unequal relations between women and men. Raising awareness about gender myths and their impacts on both women and men can help to challenge and perhaps change these stereotypes. A discussion of perceptions about women and men can also help to reveal gender myths.

Materials: Paper and markers

Process:

Step 1: Prior to group discussions, I prepared examples of stereotypical perceptions (gender myths) of women in case the group did not come up with any. Some examples of popular perceptions of the area included:

1. Men's work is harder than women
2. Women are shy, not-motivated and uneducated for community work
3. Men are aware of women's needs
4. Women are unproductive
5. Men and women are equally involved in decision making

Step 2: We met separately with each group of men. We then asked each group to describe its cultural perceptions about men and women. One way to elicit these ideas that we chose was by asking the participants to draw on the chart a woman in the middle and brainstorm ideas that come to their mind about women when they see the picture. The exercise helped the group to focus and keep track of group discussion. We repeated the same exercise by drawing the figure of a man in the middle and asked the group their perception about men. This exercise also helped out to bring out the gender myths that we intended to discuss. For example, in front of the women's figure they wrote shy, less educated, and indecisive. Whereas for men they wrote strong, breadwinners and intelligent.

Figure 2 Women's Perception from men's eyes (redrawn for the study)

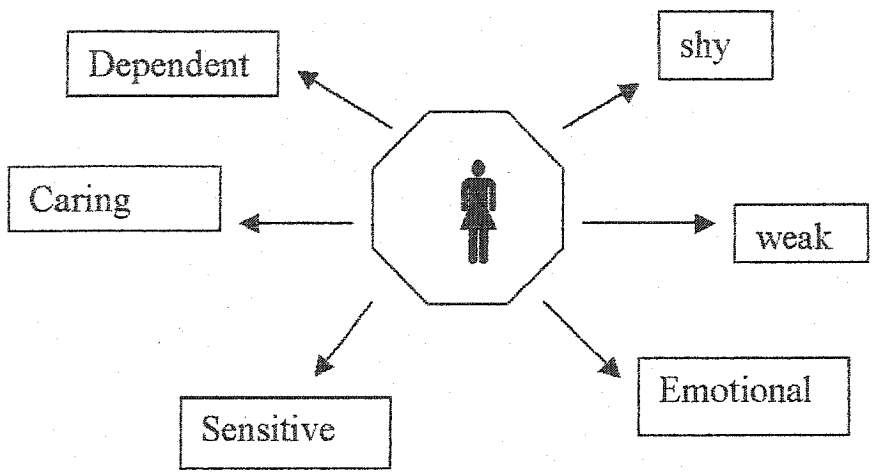
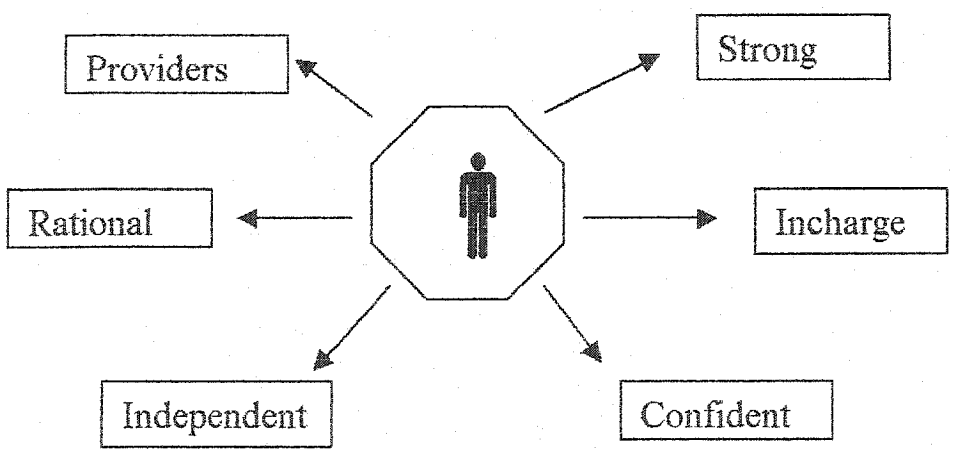


Figure 3 Men's Perception from men's eyes (redrawn for the study)



Once the exercise was completed we encouraged discussion that included the following questions:

- What activities should be avoided by respectable women?
- Who has more leisure time? Why?
- What do women and men need most to improve their lives?
- What are the strength and weaknesses of men and women?
- Who is more intelligent? Why?
- What makes a good husband/wife? Daughter/ son?

Step 3: In the same groups we referred to the perceptions and gender stereotypes listed down by the group on charts. We asked them by using questions to show how many perceptions are actually myths. Some questions we asked were:

- Are these perceptions universal truths and /or valid presentations of real life?
- What role do these perceptions play in the culture?
- Are these perceptions of women and men changing? If so, how and why?

Gender Myths in Tolti, Kharmang

We discussed perceptions of gender characteristics with village men. In conjunction with these discussions, we used sketches made by men (see figure 2 & 3) in addition to the PRA activities.

Activities that we used focused on gender myths associated with men and women's roles, relations and needs that helped us to stimulate discussion, raise awareness and challenge misconceptions and gender stereotypes. The activity worked well and elicited useful and often previously undocumented information about gender perceptions and myths. The reasons for its success lay in its application. For example, a wide range of participants of varying ages, education, wealth and ability were involved. Six groups of community men met in Kharmang; all information was shared visually to include illiterate people; use was made of humor associated with many of the perceptions; and general perceptions were discussed along with the personal examples from people's lives.

Men in our group found cultural gender stereotypes easy to identify and discussions were generally relaxed, humorous and insightful. Older people helped explore the changes in gender perceptions over time and younger people reflected on current perceptions and

provided some insights into future change. Where difficulties did arise in-group dynamics, they usually occurred when people of higher rank such as the manager of the VO etc dominated the discussion. In this situation, I asked for individual reflection about a certain perception in the group.

In Baltistan, most gender perceptions are rooted in a culturally defined acceptance of biological determinism combined with the religious ideology of Islam. Together, they create a dichotomy of gender perceptions and values that identify women and men with largely opposing characteristics and qualities. Those I interviewed perceive women as being hardworking, social, patient and sweet. Men were positively regarded as organized, active, rational and creative. In addition, women are considered to be shy, weak, emotional, sensitive, dependent, caring, associated with family, while men were seen as being confident, strong, rational, independent and linked to community and formal decision-making activities. Generally, gender perceptions gave men more status, rights and opportunities than they did for women.

Activity 3: Gender Analysis Activity Profile

Time: 60 minutes

Purpose: The Gender Analysis Activity Profile is a means to raise awareness about who is responsible for what activities in the community and why, through focus group discussions. It also helps to clarify the underlying reasons for gender-based division of labor and control over resources. Our focus group had an agenda to see the decision making power of a woman in a household. The objective of the focus group was to:

- To explore the participation of women in household decision making by asking -who does what and why?

Materials: Decision making Matrix (see table 4). Paper and markers.

Process:

Step1: We planned and wrote questions before the meeting. For an unstructured discussion, one broad topic for questions was chosen. Topic being 'Participation in household decision making'.

Step 2: We presented the initial topic followed by an unstructured group discussion.

Some questions of our focus groups meeting with the Tolti community members.

- Who decides on the use of revenue?
- Who decides on the matters about the education of children?
- Who has control over savings in the household?
- Who manages the resources in the house?

Gender Analysis Activity Profile of the VO members of Tolti, Kharmang, Baltistan

The purpose of using a decision-making matrix in this case was to examine the role and participation of women in the household decision making. First, with the help of a matrix we listed down the areas which requires collective decision-making. Next, we listed the decision-makers against the areas of decision making. Finally a matrix was produced to be filled out by the focus group members.

The matrix was then sketched on a large paper in the language of the community. Each activity was written clearly on one line. The facilitator than proceeded to inform the community about what they had discussed and explained the purpose of the exercise. Participants were asked to add to the list of activities if they perceived any that were missing.

The community members in the focus groups carried out the activity. Each group was asked to put a check mark against each activity box underneath the gender that most likely performs the activity. When the groups had completed this task they were asked to look at the other groups' charts to see if they had come up with similar responses. After the groups had done this they were asked to come together and comment on the decision-making activity. The following matrix (see table 4) illustrates the results generated in one of the groups. The results in the matrices developed in each group were more or less uniform with few exceptions.

In general, this exercise was very revealing to the group members. Their principal observations were that men were responsible for making most of the decisions in the household. The group realized that despite the fact that women participate equally in the

household they did not have much say in matters of money and education of their children. The group members could not identify any alternatives.

Table- 4 Who makes the Decisions? (reproduced for the study)

Decision on Activity	Woman Only	Man Only	Women usually	Man Usually	Both
Use of Revenue		* * * * * *			* *
Education		* * *			* * * * *
Resource Use & Management	* * * * * * * *				
Savings		* * * * * * * *			
Cultural Activities	* * * * * * * *				

*denotes each members response from the group for each category listed on left side

Reflections on the Workshop: From Information to Sensitization

Looking back at the workshop from a distance, their main lessons continue to resonate powerfully. I went to Kharmang aiming simply to collect information about how men view women's tasks. I never thought that the whole process would also sensitize the men we met about the hardships that women face in their daily activities.

However, the process was not entirely straightforward. Part of the success of these sensitization discussions is undoubtedly because it took place in a village where AKRSP had already been working with the men's organization. Therefore, we already had good rapport with the men, making it possible to enter into such sensitive discussions. We think that undertaking this type of discussion in villages where AKRSP is not working would have been much more difficult.

At the beginning of the workshop, the aim was to focus was on the participant's own attitudes, feeling and perceptions, with analytical and planning [intellectual and reflective] activities scheduled initially for three days. While we were designing the workshop we debated on how much to debrief participants after each activity, that is, how much to allow for discussion of its pros and cons and possible field applications. At this

stage we were informed that the planing stage that due to some religious festivities in the village our workshop will have to be restricted to one day only. Facing a severe time constraint, I decided to concentrate on the experience rather than on reflection after each exercise. This decision was informed by the earlier decision to immerse participants in the activities first and to concentrated on reflection and analysis later in the workshop. We tried to ensure that the workshop was based on issues of direct relevance to the participants.

We also experienced some practical problems, such as keeping the men together for the whole day that was necessary for this discussion. More importantly, however, was the need for patience. Although this account of the training makes it sound like an easy process, we had to do a considerable amount of probing by asking: 'and what else?' and 'So what does that mean?' We asked each question in several ways and, of course, had to fit our pace to that with which the men felt comfortable. The men took a considerable amount of time to answer, as if these questions were new to them. At the end of this discussion, most (but not all, as not all of the men were vocal) of the men seemed to realize that women's work is indeed harder than their own and certainly they need to be appreciated for their role in the household.

In Baltistan, the gender division of labor is defined primarily through physical attributes: man is strong, woman is weak (see figure 2). This conception of the division of labor has partially legitimated men's position as the sole inhabitants of the public sphere, since historically the tasks performed in this arena consisted of physical labor. There also exists and ideology that due to the fact that women bear children, they are more skilled in raising them. While the *purdah*[2] system does not allow women to travel outside the village without *mahram*[3], ' Women can do any type of work within the village' (man: Baltistan). Women do not have decision-making power at the community level, but when asked men were careful to point out that women did have decision-making power within their households. The assertion of male dominance brought with it an ideological

[2] Purdah maybe defined as the veiling of women in Islam.
[3] a close male relative providing escort.

degradation of women that is still highly visible in the region. One man confidently sated that, *'one man is equal to two women. Therefore, they are not my equals'*. One man echoed this sentiment when he simply said, *'women are useless'*. While trying to explain why women cannot leave the village without *mahram*, a man proclaimed that it was because, *'women are backward and not mature'*.

If the primary focus of the workshop was learning about the gender dynamics in the community, the secondary process was learning about participatory methods and tools. I learned that particular methodologies do indeed hold its ground for marginalized and often silence voices to emerge. I also learned that PRA techniques such as the ones used in the workshop helped address issues of social relations, the exclusion of particular social groups, or gender. They helped me gather information, facilitate discussion and raise awareness of issues and power relations. All the activities and efforts helped men to develop a better understanding of the strengths and capabilities of women and men to contribute to community development.

Table 1 List of Workshop Participants

S.no.	Name	Age	Education	Occupation
1.	Mohd. Abbas	28	BA	Teacher
2.	Shabir Hussain Kadio	27	FSc	Govt. Service
3.	Mohd Hasan	45	-	Tailor
4.	Mohd Ali	27	-	Painter
5.	Mohd Hasan	28	-	Shop keeper
6.	Mohd Hasan	35	-	Carpenter
7.	Mohd Hussain	24	Matric	Tailor
8.	Mohd Raza	24	Matric	Painter
9.	Mohd Taqi	35	Primary	Tailor
10.	Gulam Mohd	26	-	Primary
11.	Mohd Ali	40	Primary	Plumber
12.	Rozi Ali	45	2nd Grade	Plumber
13.	Inayat Ali	20	-	Govt. Servant
14.	Inayat Ali	25	-	Farmer
15.	Bashir	20	Matric	Farmer
16.	Mohd Hasan	55	Primary	Farmer
17.	Najaf	80	-	Govt. Service
18.	Haji Rozi Ali	30	-	Labor
19.	Wazir Gulam Mehdi	40	Primary	Carpenter
20.	Mohsin	30	Primary	Mechanic
21.	Yousuf	20	Matric	Mechanic
22.	Ahmed Ali	37	Primary	Overseas
23.	Mohd Hasan	50	-	Carpenter
24.	Mohd. Hussain	28	BA	Teacher
25.	Mohd Hussain	40	-	Farmer
26.	Asghar	35	-	Farmer
27.	Ali	60	-	Farmer
28.	Mohd Hasan	25	-	Butcher
29.	Mohd Ismail	65	6th grade	Farmer
30.	Gulam Mohd	55	Primary	Govt. service
31.	Mohd Hasan	80	-	Farmer
32.	Ahmed Ali	55	BA	Teacher
33.	Gulam Abbas	45	Matric	Govt. Service
34.	Raza	45	-	Agriculture Specialist

Table 2 Gender Workshop Timetable

TIME	ACTIVITY
10 a.m. – 10.15 a.m.	Introduction to the workshop by Nisar-Kharmang manager and Khulsoom Farman- monitor WP.
10.15 a.m. – 10.30a.m.	Participants were facilitated to form six groups, each group facilitated by an AKRSP staff member. Three activities were undertaken by each group
10.30 a.m.-11.30 a.m.	1. Daily activity charts (that also looked at the intensity of each of the key daily activities)
11.30 a.m.-12.30 p.m.	2. Gender Myths (discussion about the myths relating to women and men, looking at the cultural perception of women and men through the eyes of men)
12.30 p.m.-1.45 p.m.	Lunch Break and Afternoon prayers
1.45 p.m. – 2.45 p.m.	3. Focus group meeting (decision making matrix)
2.50 p.m. – 4.20 p.m.	Each group sharing their results from the morning session.
4.20 p.m. – 6 p.m.	Debriefing by Nisar and Khulsoom Farman on the days' achievement.

Women Feeling the Power: 'Yes, I Can!'

This section tells of the context in which rural women of Baltistan are being offered new opportunities in training, some of which, have gone beyond making ends meet to come to a better understanding of themselves. While the primary objective of this study was to research AKRSP's Management Training (MT) for women, I think it also performs an important function in making us understand how rural women in Baltistan are celebrating new powers and are setting out to change their lives and those of their families. In what follows an attempt will be made to understand the underlying gender power struggles involved in Management Training. Here the inquiry takes women manager's training as a project and I have structured the study around this training. Although the study revolves around MT and uses the words and experiences of specific women of the valleys of Baltistan, the area is merely a case study to realize that rural women have something special to say to academics and practitioners about empowerment of women. The chapter proposes to ask, first, what is the 'Management Training' for women of Baltistan? And, second, what are the possible gender power struggles involved in 'Management Training'?

First, why did I choose to study women managers and AKRSP) Management Training? Being appointed the gender coordinator for the AKRSP's Women's Program, I was curious to know: how are rural women getting more say in their own lives? What can I understand from the processes? How do they talk about the MT? I started the research to learn from the experts, both peasant women and activists, about rural women's tackling of management issues in their WOs. The issues are not only about making decisions or managing WOs, but about a new, critical awareness which gives women more self-esteem and a new capacity to draw on their own inner strengths, to work with other women to achieve what they could not do alone, and to acquire and use new skills. I came to learn how, with the active support of AKRSP, women of Baltistan achieve empowerment for themselves.

Methodology

An initial taped discussion in February 2000 with ten WSOs of AKRSP-Baltistan pointed to the importance of management training for rural women in the WOs. Further individual and group interviews on this theme were conducted in June and July 2000, and in November-December 2000. In all, twenty-three WO managers were interviewed from the four valleys of Baltisan. Few interviews were conducted with the male managers to get their views on women managing on their own. Interviews were open-ended, but were intended to unearth narratives which would facilitate an understanding of the educational process of interviewees experience with Management Training. Inquiries were also geared to learn more about the women's understanding of management issues in their WOs and of the management training they had received. After the three rounds of interviews a meeting was arranged to discuss the draft paper with the interviewees. A seminar of almost forty women concerned with WOs management issues discussed the findings of the draft paper. (Refer to table 8 for the listings of the WO managers interviewed).

Management Training

Women's Picture: Razia, who is a female manager of Kharmang WO, tells a story that encapsulates the initial struggles faced by women in the WOs before the introduction of Management Training:

> This is the story I tell, the reality of my (woman's) life. I had the idea of setting up a ladies shop, where I can sell clothes and women's accessories. So I sat down and talked to my husband. We needed the money, sadness filled our hearts, but we dreamt of a better world. So we said, 'yes, we'll do it'. My husband is in the army, I took up the venture of setting up a shop myself.
>
> At first, it wasn't easy. I had problems, we had little money, my husband pitched in so that I could start my business. When I got married I received gifts from my family and I was not using it. So I thought of selling them, that and few other items from bazar helped me start my shop.
>
> It started off good. Women came in the shop to buy. I felt good, to manage the shop and sell my things, to count every evening and see how much money I have saved. Then came the problems.
>
> Women bought items on credit and did not repay. I didn't know how to record so I lost the track of credit. I wrote my income and expenses but couldn't balance it. I lacked skills to manage the shop. I tried to record transaction in my memory and end of the day I

> forget. I was losing money when my husband did the calculation. I saw the darkness coming back into our lives. And I finally decided to shut the shop.

Why is this story worth telling? For Razia and for other Balti women, it voices many of the problems faced by the WOs: the lack of experience in setting up 'income generating projects', the limited social and technical know-how, the need to make money to survive, the unfamiliarity with competition, and the vulnerability with recording and bookkeeping.

Realizing that more was needed besides WO membership, AKRSP decided that new training should be introduced for women. As a result, AKRSP decided that 'Management Training' for women should be implemented in the Women's Programme. Since women were already involved in the management issues at a household level, it was felt that WO management training for the managers was necessary. As a result, female managers received their first training in 1995 and since then managing WOs have by and large been women managers' responsibility. Table 5 below illustrates the number of Management Training conducted by AKRSP upto March 2001.

Table 5: Management Training and Women Managers Trained

	1995	1996	1998	1999	Women
Skardu	Accounts	Accounts	Book keeping	Basic Bookkeeping	25
Shigar	Accounts	Accounts	Book keeping	Basic Bookkeeping	24
Khaplu	Accounts	Accounts	Book keeping	Basic Bookkeeping	33
Kharmang	Accounts	Accounts	Book keeping	Basic Bookkeeping	20
Total					**102**

Nusrat (WO manager-Skardu) is 25 and has gone through the training. Nusrat describes benefits of MT in the following way:

> The truth is that, before we didn't know anything about the management issues of the WO. Only now, since we've been through the training, we have learned so much. Because before, men did our books; they maintained our savings register and we always depended on them trusting them. It's only now that as a manger, when we attend the meeting, we feel organized. We have better understanding of the status of our WO.

Although slow, this initiative eventually yielded some positive results. For example, men still attended the 'management training' for women managers, despite the WOs operating under women managers. There were several problems: the training required grade eight level of education, and the training took place far from the villages, thus making it difficult for the women to attend. So when more training venues were chosen and girls education became popular, more women started attending the Management Training.

The Approach to Management Training

Management Training has had three specific objectives: skill transfer in management, the translation of skills into practice, and most importantly, equipping women with tools of leadership. MT is based on the principle that it is a gradual sequential process with different objectives reflecting stages in this process. First, the trainers provide participants with an understanding of the purpose of MT, application and practice as they relate to the WO management. Secondly, the trainers introduce participants to management tools that they can use in their WOs. Thirdly, it enables the participants to integrate the tools learned in their own 'income generating projects'.

The basis of this approach lies in its application; therefore, training is to provide skills/tools for translation into practice. The training also assists in showing participants mechanisms to identify the problem areas in application. The length of the training is generally from twelve to fifteen days. A fifteen-day course, for example, is divided into eight modules. It contains lecture, exercises and fieldwork. The participants do problem-solving exercises in small groups of three to four. Each module has a common structure to reflect tools necessary in application of the WOs concerned. Table 6 provides the timetable and course structure for a prototype fifteen day management training course. The table identifies the modules that form core of the block-building process. Each module contains a number of components with materials adapted to meet the need of the WO. In addition, each stage introduces different techniques, to enable participants themselves to introduce management dynamics. The practical application section of the training is critical, on the block-building principle it cannot be introduced before

participants have been through earlier sections of the modules. In a fifteen-day workshop, where a slower pace is possible, one day is generally allocated to this section alone.

Table 6 Management Training: A typical timetable for fifteen-day course

Day	Module
Day one	❖ Brief Introduction to the training ❖ Review the objectives of the WOs and importance of savings in the WOs.
Day Two and Three	❖ Basic principles to keep in mind while writing process registers and Agenda registers ❖ How to write a resolution for the WO
Day Four	❖ How to record savings of the WO and ❖ Importance of recording name of the participants present in the meeting
Day Five and Six	❖ Maintenance of attendance and saving register ❖ Writing up saving cards for individual members ❖ Recording savings in the Credit register
Day Seven	❖ Maintenance of Credit register ❖ Maintenance of the saving card
Day Eight	❖ Writing Cash books
Day Nine	❖ Field work :Application of the tools learned
Day Ten	❖ Learning how to distribute profit through product method
Day Eleven	❖ How to complete forms for individual and group loans
Day Twelve	❖ How to calculate service charge on the loans
Day Thirteen	❖ Review of the course
Day Fourteen	❖ Written exam
Day Fifteen	❖ Conclusion of the training: evaluation

Rural Women's Responses on 'Management Training'

In this section, the women's undertaking will become vantage point for describing the impact of training. The simple act of applying or doing here becomes real significant, as it has embraced capacities, skills, and creativity. I shall explore first the meanings attached to the 'Management Training' by rural women, and how they 'use' the training, then some problems they faced and, finally, the ways suggested by rural women to seek or to support the continuation of the 'Management Training'.

Training, education and analysis are fundamental to women's empowerment. Women managers of Kharmang, Khaplu, Shigar and Skardu have built up and been enriched by the Management Training skills and knowledge. All the WOs plan their activities within the areas defined to them through the training. This training, as I have said, includes technical issues and keeping basic accounts for the projects, as well as women practicing it in their home and business. As Shabana illustrates:

> This training doesn't help us to bring our workload down, but it means that we and our groups, wont be as dependent on the male managers any more....we know how to deal with our savings, we can start work on our own without having to wait for the male manager to turn up. So that means more women are informed, which is empowerment for our organization. (Shabana, WO manager, Khaplu)

The women in the interviews showed much optimism and enthusiasm about the training they had received, taking great satisfaction in the things they *can do*. The WSOs also see the training positively. As Bushra goes on to explain:

> They've have been trained in things they'd never have believed possible....in management, right out of the reach of the peasant women. I think, now they've started, they've developed skills... and I've seen the application of these skills on so many things, from book keeping of their business to depositing savings of their WO in the bank. This process of constant learning and training in the groups lets them develop more independence. (Bushra, WSO, Khaplu).

Generally WO managers are required to maintain certain registers to ensure effective management of their WOs. These registers include:

Table 7 Type of Registers Maintained by WOs

	Purpose
Attendance Register	Record attendance of the members present in the meeting
Saving Register	Record savings for each member in the meeting
Agenda Register	Record minutes of the meeting
Credit Register	Individual member's loan details are recorded with their payment, service charges and interest earned
Cash Book	Contains cash expenses incurred by the WO

Maintenance of these registers is significantly important when the AKRSP is evaluating the WOs. Besides these registers WO managers also have to maintain individual member's saving cards which shows each member savings upto date with the managers' signature. These cards are usually with the members of the WOs for their personal information about their savings. Table 8 illustrates the number of women managers who have received Management Training and are managing on their own without the help of male managers.

Table 8 Women managing on their own

s.no	Name of the WO	Gender	WO Strength	Managing since
1.	Astana	Female	25	1991
2.	Zgangpa	Female	29	1993
3.	Gamba Grong Tolti	Female	29	1995
4.	Gamba Kraming	Female	22	1996
5.	Kushmara II	Female	27	1998
6.	Kushmara I	Female	30	1996
7.	Astana Paeen	Female	32	1995
8.	Biasing	Male/Female	21	1996
9.	Thasskong	Female	31	1996
10.	Meerpi ser	Female	22	1996
11.	Akhonpa	Female	20	1998
12.	Sarbo Manthokha	Female	17	1993
13.	Youchung	Female	50	1998
14.	Gohoro	Female	32	1998
15.	Murkul	Female	20	1995
16.	Farol Tolti	Female	30	1996
17.	Youngpawa Gamba	Female	35	1999
18.	Raganochan	Female	22	1999
19.	Sooq Bala	Female	18	1999
20.	Lasopi –II	Female	20	1999
21.	Sher Thang	Female	24	1999
22.	GongmaGrongRanga	Female	32	1999
23.	Sukamedan	Female	23	1999

What is 'Management Training' for Rural Women?

As noted in the previous section, where the 'Management Training' is explained and its benefits and drawbacks are reviewed. I see MT as beneficial, but ask whether they are using it for the management of their WOs. I have argued that training has positive impact on rural women. I should admit that the women, which we worked with, are the successes: some women still depend on men due to cultural norms. Worse, some women lack the confidence to even try and take over from men, although these are hidden problems, which I could not reach in depth during my visits.

Clearly, all women understood the significance of the training. They all spoke of what they do, and how they do it. Every story emphasizes the importance of belonging to an organization, because this is what is helping each rural woman to acquire new skills. As noted in other chapter, they claimed that before getting the 'Management Training' they 'could not', but now they say, 'I can'. Table 9 lists the different projects undertaken by each of the 23 organizations after receiving the training. When we explored together in the focus groups what women wanted to achieve, some women were constantly looking ahead, thinking through what they want and imagining ways of achieving it. To me, imagining and thinking seem essential to set objectives and gaining self-empowerment. For Amna:

> My goal, or what the WO wants to achieve is, equality, you see, at home and in the village, and for us, as women, we should be taken into account. In infrastructure projects, for instance, or when committees are formed for projects, we want to be considered too. Not only men should be asked to join, women too. That's what we want. (Amna, WO manager, Skardu).

Designing Projects

Most of the women have small business/projects running from their homes. The women themselves have decided on them, sometimes after a thorough examination of their needs. The women of Baltistan are aware of their need to produce either income or replacements of income (as by growing vegetables or making clothes) with the objective of making their lives easier, and less crushed by poverty. These projects/businesses are seen as supplementing consumption, in addition to bolstering the family budget. The women who received the Management Training and are running the projects/businesses have seemed

to develop very rich dynamics. Instead of merely running their projects, now they are able to examine their workloads, record their profits, analyze their expenses and discuss with each other if they come across any problems with their books.

> 'now they are organized in their business, analyzing their activities and recording their sales etc. (Razia, WSO, Kharmang).

We can clearly see from Table 9 that out of twenty-three women managers interviewed fourteen women are involved in income generating activities. When inquired these women are currently practicing the skills they acquired in the management training in their daily lives such as recording profits or expenses of their activities.

Table 9 Women Managers designing their own projects

S.no.	WO	Type of Business
1.	Astana	Sewing clothes, vegetable garden
2.	Zgangpa	LadyHealth Worker, Vegetable garden
3.	Gamba Grong Tolti	Knitting, handicrafts
4.	Gamba Kraming	Poultry, Vegetable garden, her, TBA
5.	Kushmara II	Sewing Clothes
6.	Kushmara I	-
7.	Astana Paeen	Teacher
8.	Biasing	-
9.	Thasskong	Vegetable garden, sewing clothes
10.	Meerpi ser	Teacher, Health Worker
11.	Akhonpa	-
12.	Sarbo Manthokha	Sewing Clothes, Embroidery
13.	Youchung	-
14.	Gohoro	Embroidery, sewing clothes
15.	Murkul	Handicrafts
16.	Farol Tolti	Handicrafts, sewing clothes
17.	Youngpawa Gamba	-
18.	Raganochan	-
19.	Sooq Bala	Lady Health Worker, Teacher
20.	Lasopi –II	-
21.	Sher Thang	-
22.	GongmaGrongRanga	Lady Health Worker
23.	Sukamedan	Teacher

Power Struggles and the 'Management Training'

Given the *a priori* development of asymmetric gender relations in Baltistan, the maintenance of the structures of power is governed by inertia. The creation of WOs by AKRSP in the early 1990s and introduction of Management Training may have weakened the edifice of control in the first dimension, but the ideological power of the second and third dimensions precludes the articulation of challenge even where the subordinate group's frustrations are manifest. For the powerless, the combination of articulating grievances and organizing action upon them does not necessarily mean that the grievances will merit a response from those holding power. For the dominant group, prevailing inequalities, as well as the concomitant power relation, will be maintained to the extent that conflict can be contained within the latter two dimensions of power. As has been stated above, action by the dominant group on one set of grievances may act to introduce the idea of conflict into other more strategic areas. By staying aloof from the subordinate group, the dominant group may instill the belief in the dominated that there are not issues to be contested. Pocock argues (In Gaventa, 1982, p. 23) that,

> *The ruler rules not by solving other's problems, but by having none of his own; others have problems-i.e. they desire the power he has-and by keeping these unsolved he retains the power he has over them.*

During the fieldwork it emerged that there was a significant gap in understanding between men and women concerning women's ability to participate in the management of the WOs. While women thought, quite rightly, that they had the aptitude to engage fully in the management of their organizations, on the whole the men thought otherwise.

One question asked to the separate groups of male managers and female managers was whether they thought it would be possible for women to discuss and resolve the organizational issues, many of which would be technical/political in nature and few restricted to just women's issues. Women generally felt that they would have no problem. Ashcho (WO manager, Kharmang) stated that:

> I can manage on my own. I feel independent. Management training has made me independent. As a manager I can take decisions without consulting men. I can handle my own affairs. I know the women and I know the issues. They (women) talk to me.

Asma (WO manager-Shigar) agreed with Ashcho and added:

> I always wanted to be the manager... .I thought I'd never make it, and what I'm proudest of is to be with a group of women, where we learn to manage on our own. To be more than a useful tool, to be service of the other women of my WO, of my village and Baltistan. Above all to be independent and not waiting for the VO managers to come in and take over our registers thinking that we are good for nothing. (Asma,WO manager, Shigar).

At the same time there was a sense of relief among women in being able to handle their own management issues. Banu (WO manager, Khaplu) conveys this sentiment when she states:

> When we'd only just got the training, male managers helped us, but now we don't have male managers anymore, we do practically everything. And we can. Because when we had them (male manager for WO) they use to get in the way, we'd suggest something and they'd say it was impossible. They always wanted a say in what we were going to do. They want to stick their noses into everything. They try to take decisions for us. We don't want to depend on the male managers, to see them as god, on the contrary. We want to handle our own affairs, not depend on the male managers. That's what the management training is for, make us more independent. But we also don't want to limit this to just one area, but for it to spread and for other women to get this kind of training.

The male managers see the transfer of WO management issues to women as problematic. Male resistance is rooted in a mix of non-recognition of women's capability for political decision-making, the recognition of the *a priori* establishment of the male 'right' to decision-making, and an invocation of historically established barriers. In most cases these factors will interact to form a comprehensive system of exclusion to women's action within political areas at the village level. The response of one male manager is archetypal of this interaction.

> Our customs do not allow women to appear in the bazaar. When the tradition changes we will embrace the new. When things become common it will be normal.

In this man's perceptions there is a line drawn about Baltistan, separating it from the rest of Pakistan where the rules governing women's movement are considered by him to be more lax. The use of historically established and legitimate rules governing the appropriate behavior of men and women, 'Our customs', form an effective and robust barrier to women's participation. Although the male manger was referring to the possibilities for women's movement, there is no doubt that the rules governing mobility

also apply to their participation in decision making. 'Our customs' also constitutes 'the rules of the game', such that both dominant and subordinate are aware of how can participate and who cannot. In addition to, and perhaps more important than this impediment is the deeply held belief by the majority of men in Baltistan that women are mentally inferior and lack capacity for effective decision-taking.

It is the same male manager who provides the most lucid articulation of this attitude, 'I consider (Balti) women to have a deficient mind.' The conceptualization of women as having 'deficient minds' allows them to be kept out of village-level politics, ostensible because women's decisions will harm community interests. The root of this ideology is to be found in patterns of village socialization of man and woman.

The opportunity provided to women to manage and run WOs on their own has given women a limited voice within the community, a place to air their grievances and gain support from a group of peers. This change in conditions has begun to sever the nexus of control that operates to keep women in a subordinate position. In the twenty-three WOs visited, the women not only felt that they can manage on their own, but also that they are able to participate in village-level management: 'Yes of course, we are ready to participate and manage our WOs' (Woman: Khaplu). Yet, the social system that insures the interests of the dominant group is ultimately maintained by the use and the threat of negative sanctions. A point made by a man in Skardu when asked what would be the typical response to a woman going to the bazaar without *mahram*[1].

.....she would be kicked out of the village

Building Up the 'Management Training'

One Story: Fatima from Khaplu through her story presented below shows us how strongly she sees a difference in herself since she became part of the WO and then started to manage the WO on her own. Her story portrays a complete voyage, from home, through fears and joys to fulfillment. Her comments inform us how she sees her own achievements and her successes in life.

[1] A close male relative providing escort.

I passed barriers which came between me and being able to join the WO. My husband was the first barrier. '*Why are you going?* You women are just going to talk scandal and worse? You are going to neglect children and my parents,' and so on.

There are women who are just criticizing us for *joining in*, even in our own village. They say, 'There go those women!' what I am telling you is that these are the barriers that I have had to get past to be able to *join the group.*

I had the idea clear that I wanted to *join*, it was a real achievement. My other achievement was when the other women elected me to represent them, for me that's an enormous achievement, for the women were saying, 'we trust you, Fatima, to be our manager'. Then I was *taking part* in something bigger, I was representing my group to attend the Management Training, this is where I really developed my skills. Now I have a chance to work for the 28 members of my group, before I hadn't any idea at all how I was supposed to record the savings of my 28 women, how to write a cheque and how to fill out the savings card. Now, although the same obstacles I'd had before were still there, I understood the idea of being a manager more clearly.

This training helped me destroy the chains of fear, which you always feel, when you feel the panic about 'can I do it?' and finally I feel in myself, we are all together holding hands. We struggle together. Now with the training we've had, the sharing of experience with other women managers.....I've had more need to learn and to do a better job. The training workshops like this one for instance, -well, I have more motivation *to go out* and to struggle more. And now, at last, how I feel now, I place myself as being something more, I feel more valued as a woman.

I feel strongly about my family's response now. My daughter said, ' mother, I want to be like you, be a manager of a WO.' So, I'm full of pride, of happiness. Not only that, I am using the skills of record keeping in my house to keep an account on our income and expenditures. See, this is the book I have for my home expenses. Every month I know where the money is going.

And one of the things I want most is to learn more, to be able to help other women too so they can go out, further forward- or to be able to exchange what I've learned with other women, to see how they work in their WOs, what can help us and how we can help other women.

Fatima-B's story tells us a great deal about training as a tool of 'Self-Empowerment' for Balti women. Training offers rural women the pleasure of learning with other women, some of them from other areas and/or very different experiences, as in the 'Management Training'. Management training provides women with an opportunity to meet other women, learn, discuss and create possibilities. This training has amplified their capacity to choose and propose actions, projects and forms of organization, and to take more part in WO decisions. As illustrated by Asia, an activist manager from Skardu, who sees MT as:

> 'I understand that 'Management Training' helped me to say, 'Yes, I can do it!' even if they (men) tell me I can't. But I feel I can do it, and I feel the power in me.'

The means to women's training is their desire to learn, their commitment to themselves and their organizations, their positive images of themselves as women, leadership that supports rather than dominates, the development of leaders, networking, and collective support. I saw the impact of the training in the work done and decisions taken together in these WOs with more horizontal power structures where decision-making is more open to participation. For Balti women 'Management Training' appears to be more than just transfer of skill, it appears to be the journey from 'one' to 'many', in the pleasure of being together, sharing and exchanging experiences, in the joy of new knowledge and of building positive alternatives.

As I have tried to show, possible ways forward that has come out of the management training in group and the field visits. Everybody in the group has analyzed what they have learned from this particular training and how it has helped them in their personal lives. Awareness has enriched each woman and each organization to which they belong.

The women in the discussion brought with them the diversity of identities and activities we have seen. All the rural women, each in her own reality, are acquiring modern know-how through various training. They have taken on management, designed 'income generating projects', and demand for laborsaving machines –all modern, international themes. Their concern is to turn these opportunities to their own ends.

Rural women I met on the visits I made to the organizations, found a thousand ways of putting the strength of training-for women- into words, as they described the goals of their work, their tasks or their problems with application of the concepts learned, or told us how much training had helped them and how valuable it will be for the future. They no longer feel, they say, meek, incapable; they know their own capacities to change their lives and even those of their organizations. As we have see in this section, they talk of the advantages of the Management Training particularly in connection with making money. Although I felt that their financial gains were very small, as were other changes in their

lives but no matter how small these changes seem to me, they mean a great deal to these women.

The rural women in the discussions were nearly all leaders in some capacity; they were women who had reached a certain point in their own empowerment path, whatever route that had taken, which made it possible for them to be there. The discussion group consisted of women 'by definition-female managers-who have received Management Training' Perhaps they began with some sort of advantage that would make them different from others. But some women in the group had very clearly started from nowhere and fought their own way, sometimes reluctantly, into leadership in their WOs.

Where has this discussion brought us? What came across more clearly at these discussions with the women was the enthusiasm. In the interviews itself, there was no shortage of passion or of a clear sense of optimism from the rural women. The process of training seemed to help bring their dreams closer, even if slowly and step by step. We have seen, in the preceding chapters, how central that process is to the Balti women. My work with the rural women illustrates that there is great scope for this to happen, and to be encouraged and supported. There is great potential for real change and transformation. Given the successes so far of many rural women in their attempt to take up manifestations of empowerment, who can say that myriad of local solutions, local initiatives will not produce the changes necessary on a broader scale over time? In that sense, optimism of so many voices at the discussions is to be encouraged.

No Magic Bullet

The theme of this thesis is learning through struggle. In the framework developed in this thesis, learning and education are seen as complex and embedded in struggles. To develop a picture of this complexity I presented case studies of learning in struggle, making explanatory connections between broad social and cultural context, micro politics, ideologies, discourse and learning. The 'Theory of Power and Powerlessness' based on John Gaventa's work provides the theoretical underpinning of the thesis. Initially stated in the introduction and elaborated upon in Chapter Two, this framework rests on the assumptions that domination and power struggle are universal, and that while domination has an ideological dimension, it originates in social, cultural and political relationships. The implications of this position are spelt out most fully in the case studies. The narratives, learning and consciousness of the Balti women discussed are ultimately determined by their position in the society. Their essential experience of this process is of feeling powerless. The powerlessness occurs in a particular way, with men dismissing women's intellectual capacity to participate on village level issues and women recognizing these attempts and resisting them with determination. The women's constant struggle, while admirable and significant, should not divert us from understanding its nature. It is men trying to dominate women and women resisting it. This is gender power struggle, in Baltistan.

All of the studies in the thesis are stories of struggle between insurgent and dominant power. In the men's meeting in Tolti, men's ignorance of the work done by women reveals how central is the issue of women's workload to the sustenance of male predominance. While it may appear as something of a chamber of horrors, Chapter Four's chronicling of the effects of marriage, education and pregnancy on women's efficacy as social agents is critical to understanding the prospects for increasingly equitable gender relations in Baltistan. Case study on Management Training reveals the barriers of women's entry into traditional village level decision-making fora and how the

prior exercise of power conspires to prevent their political participation in the community.

Some important lessons can be learned about the nature of struggle presented in the three case studies. The case studies discussed in this thesis demonstrate how central is the role of struggle for emancipatory learning in social action. They also tell us that emancipatory struggle is complex and not always glorious. The case studies illustrate the diverse and complex nature of struggles between resistant and dominant discourses. It helps us develop a critical understanding of how power works in Baltistan. Through these case studies we were able to understand how distinctively struggle plays itself out in particular instances of social action. Above all, while important lessons can be learned from these struggles, there is no magic bullet; as each case study demonstrates, each struggle is unique and has its own dynamic.

In a book on learning in struggle, Foley (1997, p.130) discusses how central the struggle between insurgent and dominant discourses is to emancipatory learning in social action. While Foley is concerned about connecting adult education with struggles for social justice, the theoretical framework developed in his book provides a means of understanding the dynamics of critical and emancipatory informal learning in setting like Baltisan's Women's Organizations. Foley's framework encourages people to recognize that

- Learning is a dimension of human life and manifests itself in many forms;
- Informal learning is frequently implicit, embedded as it is in the routine activities of people in their daily lives;
- Much of this learning involves struggles, and these struggles are shaped by individual, interpersonal, institutional and broader social, political and cultural factors;
- Emancipatory learning and education are possible, but also are complex, ambiguous and continually contested;
- It is both possible and necessary to develop and analysis of this complexity and to act strategically.

Struggles and Learning in Baltistan's WOs

What does the Balti experience tell us about relationship of women's learning and struggles associated with social movement activity? While socio-cultural and political changes may create the necessary conditions for social movement activity, these changes do not necessarily generate such activity. For people to become actively involved in social movement change must take place in their consciousness. The account of Baltistan's WO points to the crucial role of the oppositional discourses in creating the subjective conditions for the women movement. The account also provides a link between the learning dimension of women and social movement activity, because the process of engaging with oppositional discourses is a learning process. We also noted the continually contested, complex, ambiguous, and contradictory nature of this struggle and also noted the learning dimension. The men initially tried to repress the flowering of the women organizations. Then, gradually when WOs did not directly challenge the status quo and AKRSP adherence to the 'cultural norms' of the society, the men were forced to allow liberalization of WOs[1].

The analysis also gives a broad-brush picture of development of WOs from the late 1980s to the late 1990s. By early 1990s we saw ideological support to Baltistan's WOs, religious leaders deep-seated essentialist view of women and patriarchal practices produced conflicts which led to undermine the progress of women's activities for four months. Baltistan's WOs also reveals that community-based women's organizations were important emancipatory learning sites. In these organizations women were able to develop critical analyses of the socio-cultural factors that shaped their lives. With time, there was a growing recognition among women of the specificity of women's struggles and a clearer assertion of women's interests. The process, by which women learned to articulate these demands were gradual, sometimes spoon-fed. The WOs provided them with a platform to commence the discourse of demands and rights. The rights that were demanded those of women: 'what the WO wants to achieve is, equality, you see, at home and in the village, and for us, as women, we should be taken into account' (woman participant: Skardu).

[1] See Chapter 3 for full discussion.

With the formation of WO, AKRSP provided women with skills, training and resources that helped them to empower themselves. The acquisition of these training and skills was for these women a radical, transformative learning experience. The experience of Baltistan's women also shows that learning is cumulative and developmental, it is not linear, and is embedded in conflict.

We can obviously say that women's social movement activity had a learning dimension. Women's organization and struggles constituted important spaces for learning. Learning requires time, and opportunity for discussion and reflection. Women organizations provided these. Critical learning developed in Baltistan's Women's Organizations, which extended them and moved them beyond their current understanding. The role of oppositional discourses in forming women's organization helped women to develop consciousness that moved them beyond their current understanding.

The learning of women in WOs is significant, in two related ways. First, through the WOs women acquire skills and knowledge. They develop expertise in skills like agriculture, health and management, which they continue to use subsequently. They develop understanding of AKRSP and its projects, and skills in working with outside agents. By becoming members of the WOs they also develop skills in, and an understanding of the complexities of, building democratic forms of organizations and taking part in the projects and training etc.

The other dimension of learning in WOs relates to what Freire (1972) called conscientisation, and Mezirow (1987) named perspective transformation. The experience of the women participants in gender meeting challenged the participant's understanding of the world. In case study of MT women realized that gaining access to the management issues of WOs and thus participation in decision making at village level is something that had to be struggled for. The initial faith in authority (men) was replaced by an understanding of some of the ways in which authority works to manipulate gender relations. Finally, the women learned that they could acquire expertise, take action and

change things. These learnings were significant and empowering for women of Baltistan. They were also incidental and not articulated systematically at the time. This is called informal learning in social action or in other words learning in the struggle.

Directions

It is hoped that the preceding chapters have provided a lucid analysis of the various mechanisms and processes of power that serve to maintain women's political subordination. Women's subordination in Baltistan is the result of the interaction between instruments of power's three dimensions. As has been touched on earlier, these mechanisms are not only exercised by the dominant groups against women, but the internalization of roles and ideologies means that women themselves are unable to recognize many of the barriers facing them in the struggle over women's participation in the community. Without tackling the structural problems operating in the latter two dimensions of power, specifically regarding internalization, the results yielded by working on enhancing women's participation alone will be paltry. While women may be able to voice their frustrations with the existing social arrangement, they may be unable to surmount obstacles in other, seemingly disconnected arenas. While grievance is being expressed on one set of issues, women's attitudes on another topic may be entirely contradictory. For example, in the communities surveyed for this study women lamented their low educational status, yet few of all the village women would reject early marriage or childbirth, as well as their domestic chores in favor of continuing their education. However, this must not be seen as a failure on the part of women, rather it represents the use of power by the dominant group to engineer and outcome amongst the subordinate group.

> *You can change the regime by offering a more attractive alternative rather than by threatening national survival. A threat to national survival makes people close ranks, whereas the prospect of a better future opens people up.*
>
> (George Soros,1999, p. 39)

Although George Soros was referring to national reconstruction in the Balkans following NATO's successful air-war in 1999, the above quotation is no less salient for the situation facing AKRSP women's subordination in Baltistan. As was shown in preceding

chapters there is a stubbornness to change in Baltistan and external development initiatives are viewed with a degree of suspicion. There is also a belief that the extant social order is the only legitimate and viable form of social organization, 'we are taught in our mosques and *imambarghahs*[2] that women can only do work in *purdah* and cannot go outside without *purdah*. It is against our culture and religion' (woman: Khaplu). As regards to women, 'culture' in Baltistan forms what Jean Francois Lyotard and Michel Foucault describe as a hegemonic metanarrative. That is, as systems which attempt to explain all reality, 'these metanarratives are privileged discourses that deny and silence competing discourses' (Parpart, p.440). For Faucault, 'reason' is born of chaos and 'truth' simply an error transformed into permanence by the long process of history (Parpart). The successful challenging of the false power of hegemonic knowledge rests upon the development of suitable alternative discourses that provide options for the interpretations of reality.

Gender-equitable methods can be both advocated and employed by AKRSP to open up the prospects for a 'better future' for the people of Baltistan. One effective method for tackling problems concerning women's subordination would be commencement of pilot projects in a number of communities of Baltistan. The force of precedent is extremely important in establishing the means of sustainable development, as was pointed out by a man in Skardu village when it was argued that since women make up half the population of the village and perform more work than men they should be given a say in community decision-making. 'It would be better, but there is not a single example in all of Baltistan where women are ordering men. That's why neither women are not trying to make decisions, nor are men accepting women's decisions.' Although his logic is rather Manichean in that he conceives of power as being zero-sum, and the acquiring of greater decision-making powers by women will lead to their 'ordering men', he does make a very relevant point. A uniform society is not a fertile ground for the development of discourses that can provide alternative social systems. The pilot project would entail a selection of a handful of Baltistan's more 'progressive' villages, working closely with these communities in a range of initiatives which will be discussed below. The benefit of

[2] mosques of Shiites Muslims are called *Imambargahs*

this approach is that while consuming fewer of AKRSP's resources than a region-wide campaign, it can generate better and more equitable results. A region-wide effort to modify Baltistan's existing social structure is likely to be viewed by the local male populace as an imposition of external values and is likely to meet strong resistance from local elites, particularly from the clergy.

The advantage of the pilot project lies in the fact that AKRSP will be working and cooperating with communities that are more open to new and different ideas as well as having a population of women with a low degree of internalization of dominant values. One example from the sample of villages (visited for this study) of suitable community is Hussainabad in Skardu. Seeing the socio-economic benefits of greater inter-gender equity, it is likely that other villages will follow the pilot project's pattern and adopt the changes themselves without AKRSP's intervention. Although there may be hostility both to AKRSP, as well as the communities involved in the pilot project, it is likely to be minimal sicne only a handful of communities will be involved. Intra-village resistance should be zero if the communities have been chosen with due care and attention. With the passage of time, as other communities begin to integrate aspects of pilot project and its effects begin to snowball, change will appear indigenous rather than having been imposed by an external force. Such a project will demand not only the long-term dedication of AKRSP, the results may not become apparent for several years, but also a great amount of strength on the part of both AKRSP and the selected communities.

One effective method for tackling problems concerning women's subordination would be AKRPPs vigorous use of PRA techniques to help create awareness among both men and women of the ideologies and structures that curtail women's participation. One might well ask why men would be willing to surrender much of their current power over women in favor of a more gender-equitable social system. In response, I will argue that seeing the unfolding socio-economic benefits of greater inter-gender equity men will, over time, favor a relatively more open society. The participatory methodologies must seek to recognize and challenge the social structures that perpetuate women's subordination. At the outset of the pilot project, PRA facilitators must work with separate

groups of men and women and efforts will have to be made to involve members of households from all strata of society. Although participatory methodologies are not themselves empowering, they can be used to engineer environments that are conducive to empowerment. As regards to empowerment, PRA's most important contribution is that it encourages the perception of 'limit situations', which may be defined as issues that may not be linked to oppression but provide initial grievances around which self-determined action may be taken by the subordinate group (Gaventa, 1982, p. 208). As Heaven Crawley (1998) writes, 'the first step in empowerment is women's ability to define their needs and realties…identifying share interest increase women's individual and social motivation to work at changing existing circumstances' (p. 27). Initially collective actions form around women's practical concerns, such as lack of girl's education or adequate water supply, which may not be directly related to their subordinated position. The self-organization of women for collective action on self-determined issues arouses the critical consciousness of both the individual and the group.

> *As critical perception is embodied in action, a climate of hope and confidence develops which leads [women] to overcome limit situations…As reality is transformed and the limit acts are superseded, new ones will appear, which in turn will invoke new limit acts.* (Friere, p. 72).

With this dialectic process of articulation and action, along with reflection about what is occurring, the consciousness and confidence necessary for more widespread challenge begin to grow. In his study of the domination of rural mining communities by absentee landholders in Appalachia, John Gaventa (1982) found that while starting with relatively non-confrontational goals the indigenous community development initiatives moved to challenge the oppression faced by the miners.

> [The miners] *conceptions of themselves and their situation seemed to change with increased participation, the first collective action defined by the group to be in their interests was a garbage clean-up; the next to was a health clinic; then came the crafts co-operative, only as such actions successfully occurred did conceptions of interests upon which to act move to notions of independent housing, jobs and economic development* [strategic concerns]. (p. 211)

As the primary non-conflictual limit situations are overcome, the subordinate group may eventually be faced with a obstacles. The structural obstacles during the advance of limit situations can force a change in the subordinate group's perceptions of its interests. Over

time, through a process of deliberating upon and executing collective social action, the definitions of interests will shift from those involving little inter-gender conflict to the development of alternative s to the existing social order, and perhaps to the challenging of the order itself. Early successes in performing limit acts followed by obstacles in overcoming subsequent limit situations can lead the subordinate group to consider the role of power in creating and maintaining barriers to a better life. Through indigenous actions, the instilled sense of powerlessness will begin to fade. As actions upon perceive limit situation are successful, more participation will occur, leading to further action, an interrelationship between participation and consciousness is evident, in that one becomes necessary for the development of the other in the process of community change.

As AKRSP has recognized, the starting point for the social organization of disempowered groups is 'the present, existential, concrete situation, reflecting the aspirations of the people' (Freire, 1972, p. 68). With the pilot project AKRSP will be able to concentrate on supporting a small number of WO's in surmounting their limit situations and striving to create the possibility of more equitable gender –relations.

It is suggested that AKRSP should continue to employ PRA methodologies on gender issues with men and women of Baltistan. As seen in Chapter Three and Four, activities such as gender division of labor, decision-making matrix, story telling, worked as a powerful tool. For example, gender division of labor exercise in Chapter Five with men, demonstrated to men the extent of subordinate groups unremunerated labor. Story telling in Chapter Four helped build women's confidence and sense of self-worth, as well as augmented their bargaining position with men. Likewise, men became sensitized to women's issues and developed a greater willingness to co-operate with their wives and other female family members.

One further recommendation is that research into the dynamics of household resource management is undertaken. The 'resource profile' approach entails the recognition that gender relations in the households are organized along different, parallel 'resource' dimensions: material; human; social; cultural; political; access to common property; and

so on. Each family has a portfolio of resources through which it seeks to arrange survival, enhancement and security of income flows and other services, thus achieving a virtuous circle of mutually reinforcing resources. Such 'resources' crucially include relationships and status rather than just 'things'. People can be poor in assets and human capital, but they can also be poor in the networks which offer access to opportunities, preferential prices, subsidized credit, and son on: i.e. 'people can be poor in people'. Collecting data through this portfolio of resources will help AKRSP to analyze as well as monitor the value of gender division of labor and gender issues existing in the households. It is a tool that recognizes that not all indicators are quantitative, and that qualitative analysis of problems and progress can be organized categorically. It will also offer AKRSP a conceptual understanding of the gender issues within the households and observe where the vulnerability or weak links exists in terms of gender.

An understanding of women's political position within the family is critical to any gender program. While the prospect of 'interfering' in the private domain is daunting, the importance of examining livelihood patterns within the home cannot be stressed enough. There is a general consensus in the canon of development literature that women spend a higher proportion of their resources on their children than do men, in order to endure a higher health and educational level for the next generation, and to raise human and social capital, understanding women's relationship to household resources becomes an important issue, it also o raise the question of whether children benefit more of support is give to the father or the mother. In a comparative study of household resource management in developing countries, Kate Young (1997) has argued that the traditional gender division of responsibilities causes significant distortions in spousal resource allocation and expenditure.

> *....The typical pattern of outlays seems to be that a higher proportion of women's income, whether earned personally or given as an allowance, goes towards the non durable expenditures associated with the collective aspects of family life-and particularly on children-while men's earnings go towards consumer and other durables s well as personal spending.* (p. 141).

The effect of this distortion in allocation and expenditure causes the development of a critical difference between man and wife. Women's expenditure will change, and will

invariable increase over time, according to the size of household (the number of children and other dependants, visiting relatives etc.). Women's expenditure on children will increase with age until the children themselves become income earners or leave the natal home. Men's' expenditure, on the other hand, remains relatively stable. Thus, 'there is a possible divergence in the interests of husband and wife regarding family size' (Young, 1997, p. 150).

As regards to the future of Baltistan, increasing gender equity is a pre-condition for sustainable development and the general well being of the population, both male and female. Greater cooperation between men and women in Baltistan, brought about through the development of alternate systems of understanding reality, will open up the possibility of a bright future for the regions' coming generations. While men may not be open to explicit idea of change, they are amenable to a number of strategies that can introduce te idea of change to society. The use of participatory methodologies such as PRA by AKRSP to effect positive change in the region can yield maximum results with minimum input. Although not talking about development, Mr. Bill Clinton's following remarks about reforming America's public school system could just as easily apply to AKRSPs future effort for gender equity in Baltistan.

> *The important thing is for people to understand that neither demanding without assisting nor providing without insisting will work. This twin approach-investing in our schools and holding them accountable to the highest standards-is already producing a learning revolution...Now we need to apply this approach nationwide.*

9

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