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### EMPOWERING WOMEN IN DRYLANDS – ISSUES, REMEDIES AND IMPLICATIONS

#### 1. Introduction

1. About 3.6 billion of the world's 5.2 billion hectares of dryland used for agriculture has suffered erosion and soil degradation. In more than 100 countries, one billion of the world's population is affected by desertification, forcing people to leave their farms for jobs in urban areas. Desertification takes place in dryland areas where the earth is especially fragile, rainfall is nil and the climate is harsh. The result is the destruction of topsoil followed by loss of the land's ability to sustain crops, livestock or human activities. The economic impact is very severe, with a loss of more than US\$40 billion per year in agricultural goods and an increase in agricultural costs.

2. Climatic changes can trigger the desertification process, but human activities are frequently the proximate cause. Over-cultivation exhausts the soil. Deforestation removes the trees that hold the soil to the land. Overgrazing of livestock strips the land of its grass. According to a United Nations study, about 30 per cent of the earth's land - including 70 per cent of drylands - is affected by drought. Such a condition is always accompanied by water scarcity which forces communities to consume unhygienic water, leading to poor health and water-borne diseases. Moreover the drylands store saline water, which affects land productivity, which in turn becomes a cause of health problems. Every day about 33,000 people starve to death. Desertification creates conditions that intensify wildfires and whirlwinds, adding to the tremendous pressure on the earth's most precious resource – water – and, of course, the animals that depend on it. According to the World Wide Fund for Nature, the world lost about 30 per cent of its natural wealth between 1970 and 1995.

3. Drylands are important areas of biodiversity and are home to 2.3 billion people worldwide, both rural and urban dwellers, and at the same time drylands are among the most risk-prone ecosystems. Women and desertification share a dynamic relationship since women serve on the front lines of dryland management. *This paper aims at understanding the issues faced by women in drylands and the initiatives taken to solve them.*

#### 2. Poverty and women in drylands – Policy framework and initiatives taken by various stakeholders

##### Poverty and women in drylands

4. Around the world millions of women live in rural areas of the drylands, depending on agriculture for survival. Most drylands have scorched soil that is not suitable for agriculture production. The water-tables in

these regions are very low, which creates pressure on the natural resources and thus on the survival of humans and livestock. The majority of the people in the dry regions face acute poverty and are not able to make ends meet. This apart, the dry rural areas remain backward in terms of infrastructure facilities such as water supply, schools, hospitals, electricity, transportation, credit or insurance, which leaves them in exacerbated situations of scarcity leading to poverty.

5. The lives of women who live in the drought-prone rural areas are in a very critical state, given the insecure livelihoods that compel them to migrate in search of work, income and better standards of living. Women in drylands spend most of their productive life labouring for the well-being of their families. In the majority of cases, given their precarious livelihoods, these women are not able to invest their time in acquiring skills that could help them to achieve better incomes if they were given good opportunities and assistance. In order to meet their families' essential needs, women often become involved in a number of economic activities such as animal husbandry, crop production, handicrafts, forest produce collection and so on. They often work for more than 10 hours a day in addition to their daily routine household work. Consequently, women often experience poor health conditions resulting from excessive stress and malnutrition; also, these women frequently do not have adequate time to help their children in their education, since most of their time is spent on household or economic activities, ultimately leaving these children illiterate and further caught up in the vicious cycle of poverty.

6. Women in rural areas and drylands are closely associated with utilization of natural resources such as water and forestry products, since they manage most of the household and economic activities. Poor women are required to undertake income-generating activities to fulfil the basic needs for sustaining their families. Women's lives and livelihoods are primarily linked to water. But scarcity or negligence with regard to the maintenance of water supplies in semi-arid or dry regions compel women to travel long distances in search of water. This leads to losses in income because women's productive time is taken up with water collection. For the poor, loss of income means insecurity regarding food, health and work and increased vulnerability to disasters and risks. The situation of female agriculture workers is even worse. Apart from the increasing lack of employment, the daily needs for water, fuel and other NTFPS (non-timber forest products) for the household can now hardly be fulfilled by them, due to the severe and escalating environmental conditions and imbalances in biodiversity.

7. Despite agriculture's being the major occupation in rural areas throughout the drylands, hardly any need-based emphasis is given to agriculture development. Although several agriculture research institutions exist, most of them work in isolation. Not much has been done towards making the drylands favourable for livelihood activities. Furthermore only a small amount of transfer of research or technology from laboratory to rural areas takes place. As a result the development of agriculture is well below its potential. This has an effect on both productivity and income, particularly for marginal and poor farmers. In other cases small and marginal agricultural workers have already lost most of their land and assets in the absence of agriculture-related backward-forward linkages and rapid industrialization. Accordingly migration and casual labouring becomes the last resort.

8. One additional problem for women living in the drylands is that they are the ones who are most affected by natural calamities such as droughts, famines, earthquakes and cyclones. Their lives are shattered, with huge loss of life, property and livelihoods during such incidents. They are in no position to think of their future survival or to take any decision that would help them in recovering from the loss.

9. Women in drylands and/or in the disaster-prone areas should be helped to build the necessary capacity to cope with crises so that they are in a position to take precautions and be prepared well in advance to mitigate future risks. These women also need to have the confidence that they have the capacity to recover from losses through their own trade and livelihood supporting systems.

## **Policy framework**

10. The most popular pictures presented of women living in desert lands are those which represent these women as victims. They are the victims of fundamentalist societies. They are the victims of underdevelopment, poverty, low life expectancy, high illiteracy, violence and discrimination, among other things. These images of helpless dryland women victims are highlighted by the media and reinforced by

academia. The policy framework of workers shows that discrimination between men and women is still prevalent. There are still differences between the wages paid to men and those paid to women; men are usually paid higher wages as compared to women for the same kind of work. Poor women do not have access to social security measures, credit facilities or any assets in their name. Most legal support measures are in men's favour. Despite such gender discrimination, Governments do not often make provisions for women in their annual budgets. Even if any provisions are made, the resources do not reach the women. The rural areas where the majority of women in the drylands live do not often have appropriate banking facilities. It is also difficult for women to obtain credit or micro-finance facilities from commercial banks.

11. There is, however, a positive side to women's lives in the drylands. Most women in drylands work as producers, workers and entrepreneurs, thus contributing to the family and to the economy. They work on their family farms, as agricultural labourers on other people's farms, in forests collecting forest products, as construction workers, as street vendors, as artisans, as factory workers, as livestock tenders - the list is endless. In India, for example, 92 per cent of employment is in the informal sector, where there is no fixed employer-employee relationship, and nearly 50 per cent of these workers are women. These workers, both men and women, contribute 64 per cent of the country's gross domestic product and nearly 70 per cent of the country's savings. Awareness of this, the reality of life in the drylands, is essential for improving policy development at grassroots level.

12. Issues for sustainable livelihood in drylands. For people in drylands, the following are the prime issues which need to be addressed.

- How to empower and build the capacity of marginalized groups;
- How to provide and increase livelihood security for economically vulnerable households and diversify their income-generating activities;
- How to improve the productivity of the natural resource base in a sustainable and equitable manner;
- How to develop effective mechanisms for involving communities in decision-making;
- How to build the capacity of communities to establish and manage their own development projects;
- How to enhance the preparedness of communities and households to cope with natural and social crises and also to take a proactive step;
- How to extend economic and social security to the poorest of the poor;
- How to support social development of the rural poor, especially women, through savings, insurance and access to credit.

## **Peculiarities of life in drylands – the mindset of women**

### A. Strong socio-ecological links

13. The connection between biodiversity and communities is tighter and closer for drylands than in almost any other ecosystem. For communities living in these regions, natural resource management is the most important factor in livelihood security, and they learn to strike a delicate balance in what can be a fragile environment. Understanding this, along with other socio-ecological dynamics, will help to enhance prospects for people's survival and the management of natural resources.

### B. Increasing workload and responsibilities

14. Land degradation affects men and women differently, given their differing productive roles. While stress and hardship arise for everyone as the resources closest to a community begin to disappear, women usually end up traveling longer distances to compensate, often under harsh and unsafe conditions. Their workload grows as they struggle to collect food and fuel (FAO, 1993). Erosion and diminished soil fertility cut into agricultural production and additional sources of income. And if a family can no longer survive using its traditional production strategies, young people in rural areas, especially men, embark on seasonal or permanent migration. This puts a sharp strain on those left behind – very often the women – as labour increases, but results in less output because of the declining carrying capacity of the soil. Women also take over roles traditionally handled by men (FAO, 1993).

C. Knowledge for survival

15. As is true in other environments, women in dryland areas are the primary custodians of indigenous knowledge systems. They have acquired extensive understanding of their natural environment, of its flora, fauna and ecological processes. They know the best trees for fuel, which plants have medicinal uses, where to find water in the dry season, and the right conditions for growing local crops.

D. Access to land and land ownership

16. Despite their skills, women's autonomous access to natural resources is often extremely limited, as traditional rules restrict their property rights over land, soil, trees and water. When such resources become scarce, as is the case with desertification, time-honoured customs such as gleaning by poor people, and women in particular, are no longer permitted. The decline in available resources may also result in the male head of the household's selling his land, which strips the family of an essential safety net.

E. Women's voices and actions

17. Women's perspectives rarely appear in the realms of decision-making, politics and administration relating to drylands, even though they may be the prime managers of dryland resources. Cultural practices and religious norms may hinder women from active participation.

F. Issues in management of natural resources

18. In developing countries most of the poor live in rural areas and depend directly on natural resources and ecological services for their livelihoods. In most cases over 60 per cent of the county's population depends on agriculture, fisheries and forests for their livelihoods and the dependence of the poor on natural resources is greater than the dependence of the non-poor. However, the availability of natural resources to rural communities and especially to the poor has severely eroded. This is largely due to two parallel and interrelated processes.

19. The growing degradation of natural resources, both in quantity and quality, is evident from trends such as declining forests, deteriorating soil conditions, depleting water resources, pollution of surface water and groundwater and destruction of fish life. Key processes such as unsustainable consumption patterns, population growth, choice of resource intensive technologies, erosion of local knowledge and severe curtailment of customary rights of local communities to resources, with an associated decline in community management practices, have led to increasing environmental degradation, vulnerability of marginalized communities, particularly women and tribal communities, and widespread poverty.

20. Over the past two decades, community-centred natural resource management initiatives have widely demonstrated their positive impact in reversing environmental degradation and strengthening rural livelihoods. The national policy environment and mainstream programmes have increasingly focused on participatory development and management of natural resources. In the process, the role of people's organization in natural resource management has been rightly highlighted. Equally important, the role of women has become "visible" and increasingly recognized. Social mobilization and women's empowerment have now become the underlying features of mainstream national programmes on natural resources development and management.

G. Asset creation from the viewpoint of poor women

21. In order to understand the correlation between work, money and entrepreneurship, let us see what a poor woman views as assets. Of tangible assets, there may be some money — perhaps some cash savings, or silver jewellery. She may have a roof over her head, which can then be turned into a workplace. She may have a cow or a buffalo, or she may own a weaving loom given to her by her family.

22. The list of intangible assets is long, but quite noteworthy. Education is an asset that few possess, but even basic literacy can be turned to good advantage. Children are an enormous asset, because the more hands that work, the more income the family has. Husbands can be assets or liabilities. A husband who

does not have a drinking problem, for example is an asset. In-laws who will allow her to work outside the house are an asset. The goodwill of one's caste is an asset. So women look at their lives and find those assets that they can turn into capital. A woman with few skills and no money still has her labour as an asset. She sells her labour, pulling carts, carrying loads, working at construction sites. Women with traditional skills such as basket making or junk smithy make wares at home and sell them in the market. Some are traditional vendors such as the vegetable vendors. Muslim women, whose cultural norms do not allow them to work outside the home, turn to sewing garments and block-printing and tie-dyeing. Some make bidis at home, depending on the contractor for both work and the price they will get for it.

23. The poor need to be able to build assets if they are to break the cycle of subsistence, deprivation and survival. With assets, the poor can build more assets, their control over their enterprises increases, and their lives begin to change. With assets, poor women invest in the health, education and welfare of their families. Poor women need to be able to borrow and save, they need bank accounts in their own names, they need to be free of dependence on money-lenders, they need loans to buy better tools, and they need loans for housing improvements and repairs. Poor women need assets as individuals, but also collectively, such as group loans for village fishponds or fodder farms. Most importantly, poor women need banks willing to make very small loans of short duration, tailored to their needs.

#### H. Credit

24. It is imperative to address the issue of poor people's lack of access to productive resources. They need credit facilities for their small enterprises. Poor women's needs for financial services are as important as those of poor men. They need loans to build their businesses. They need a safe place to put their savings. These women need recognition as economic agents who save, who repay loans, and who use the loan productively, utilizing the income for family and for redemption of loans from private loan sharks. The development of credit supply to small producers must be an integral part of financial policy and development assistance at all levels. Ultimately, the process of capitalization has to conclude with the creation of capital at the level of the poor individual's household and at their group's level. This is where the real benefit of sustainability and growth lies.

#### I. Income

25. The quantitative contribution of poor women to their family income is not only highly significant but the qualitative contribution is also of immense value to their families. Unlike the males, who spend on average 50-55 per cent on themselves, poor female workers spend hardly any more than an average five per cent on themselves (Shram Shakti Report surveys, 1988). Their entire earnings are spent invariably on the upbringing and settlement of their family members. As more and more income goes into the hands of women, therefore, the quality of life of poor families improves faster.

#### J. Economic and social security

26. Credit, however, is not enough; the self-employed poor also need creative economic security schemes. In many parts of the world they are not covered by Government benefits such as workman's compensation or social security. They do not have access to life insurance or maternity benefits. They do, however, merit access to the employment rights that full-time formal-sector workers take for granted. We call access to these basic rights "full employment". Despite past promises, full-employment has not yet come from Governments or the private sector at the household level. A reliable source for the economic security brought by full employment is people's organizations comprised of the self-employed themselves. Developing economic security schemes by and for the poor is not a dream; it is already a reality in some parts of the world. At SEWA in India, we have set up a successful social security scheme built on members' contributions which covers risks in their lives and risks at work viz. insurance covering life, accident, widowhood, hospitalization, maternity and damage to working tools and work space because of calamities.

27. The people's sector needs organized efforts to build members' economic self-sufficiency, raise them up beyond the survival level, and give them something tangible to rely on in the future. The poor cannot rely only on Governments or the private sector; they need people's organizations to build the structures and mechanisms that will increase their economic security.

## Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA): a case in India

28. Community-based organizations such as SEWA focus on livelihood and overall development issues and attempt to solve them collectively with women members. SEWA promotes women's own organizations and makes them self-reliant through their own trade activity. The reason behind this is that they themselves are the stakeholders in jobs, income and social security, and so they need not depend on anyone else in future but become self-reliant. SEWA organizes women to achieve their goals of full employment and self-reliance through the strategy of struggle and development together.

29. In drylands and drought-prone areas, agriculture is risky. The small and marginal farmers are forced to sell off land or to work as labourers. The frequent droughts, salinized land and so on which affect agriculture and related activities further worsen the miseries of small farmers. In order to strengthen this major primary occupation, SEWA has initiated Integrated Land and Water Management (ILWM) activities in the dry desert districts of Kutch, Patan and Surendranagar, covering 40,000 small and marginal farmers in 400 villages.

30. SEWA has done considerable work in the dry districts of North Gujarat and has helped members in taking up non-farming activities for survival such as handicrafts, embroidery, weaving, salt farming, gum collection, forest produce collection, animal husbandry and eco-regeneration activities including water management, plantations and the cultivation of nurseries.

### Approach:

31. SEWA has adopted a comprehensive, integrated approach that is designed to place the villagers – the poorest of the poor and women in particular – at the centre of the development process. All planning, implementation and monitoring are demand-driven and conducted by the beneficiaries themselves. The six individual components of this comprehensive, integrated approach are as follows:

- Capacity building and stakeholder empowerment
- Enhancement of livelihood systems and crisis coping capability
- Disaster preparedness and mitigation
- Social development
- Project management activities
- Food handling

### Socio-economic condition of SEWA members

32. SEWA members, as mentioned earlier, are poor self-employed women. Most of them are illiterate and asset-less with little or no access to any market or skill-improvement opportunities. They are consistently exploited:

- By the Government, which by disregarding them while making policy-level decisions renders their efforts invisible;
- By the traders who take advantage of their lack of access to markets and information, buying and selling their products at unfair prices;
- By the moneylenders who take advantage of their illiteracy and lack of access to credit and charge them exploitative rates that permanently traps them in a vicious cycle of debt;
- And, most importantly, by men and by society who ignore the value of the tremendous work women do continuously at the cost of their own health (labouring, collecting water, making food, giving birth, caring for the old and young, etc.). They are ridiculed for attempting anything out of the ordinary and are forced by society to remain dependent;
- Society also imposes unjustified and baseless norms on these women, thereby curbing their right to earn their livelihoods and to be independent.

## **SEWA's experiences in desertification programmes**

33. SEWA has been organizing forestry, nursery and farm-related activities together with food security to create an eco-balance between livestock and the land. Women who live in the dry desert regions of Gujarat have been planting trees to improve vegetation and to stop advancing deserts and soil deterioration. The major programmes undertaken in these areas are listed below.

### **Eco-Regeneration Programme**

34. This programme consists of three activities, viz. nursery raising activities, sapling plantation activities and fodder farming. These activities naturally require the use of water, which is obtained from local water sources such as bore wells, field ponds and wastewater. A sustained supply of water is core to regenerating arid areas through forestry. So water is very much a forestry issue.

35. SEWA's Eco-Regeneration Programme in Banaskantha district has helped to combat land degradation, desertification and erosion through the creation of green belts. Seedlings raised at the nursery have been planted in the area. In 1995, almost nine lakhs of seedlings were sold; so preserving ecology is economically viable. Economy and ecology are combined in SEWA's forestry work. Further, under this programme, over 350 hectares of community and government wastelands are used for fodder farming and agro-forestry purposes. New plant varieties and cultivation techniques are tested to increase the survival rates and productivity of the plants. During village meetings, villagers are educated by SEWA members on how they can protect their environment. Trees are planted around the agri-lined ponds. Trainings is offered to the women. The focus is on women, and the starting point is their wisdom and traditional knowledge of forestry. When forestry provides wages, and also improves the living environment, women are the first to sustain it. Forestry must generate income to be sustainable.

36. A slow but positive impact is achieved in the Eco-Regeneration Programme. The concept of handing over nursery raising to community groups has been accepted in principle. The women have successfully created nursery in Banaskantha district and have developed coordination with the panchayat, farmers and private nurseries through organized gram sabhas and village meetings with the help of the spearhead team, in order to increase the marketability of the saplings raised by them.

37. The Eco-Regeneration Programme maximizes the economic use of water by training women to apply water conservation techniques and to re-use wastewater.

### **Fodder security system**

38. The fodder security system distributes fodder to the dairy cooperative members during lean summer months and floods. The fodder distributed is obtained from a fodder bank, which purchases dry fodder during the harvest season and stores it. In future, the Eco-Regeneration Programme will be able to supply the fodder through its fodder farms. Most milk producers are primarily cattle breeders and not farmers. They strongly depend, therefore, on the availability of fodder from farms and trees. In the past, the majority of the cattle-owning families migrated to better grazing areas during the lean summer months; this was forced migration. With the fodder security system, the migration rate among cattle-owning families has decreased substantially. Secondly, the fodder security system has reduced grazing pressure on the marginal waste and forest lands during the most critical drought months. This positively affects the living environment in the villages.

### **Water management**

39. SEWA has learnt through its long experience that women's work and development depends on water, both directly and indirectly, in terms of time saved for the development of micro-enterprises. It is also an important source of employment for village women, who sell their saplings and plantations. They care for the forests as if they were their own. So, if women have a right to life and to work for a living, they have a right to water. This includes water for drinking, cooking, washing and domestic irrigation. However, they face many problems in getting adequate amounts of water for plantation purpose as well as for drinking. Water problems become aggravated in most dry desert districts due to salinity in the soil. Women make

tremendous efforts to get soil from other areas and to carry water from great distances. Therefore, women are the most affected by inhospitable environments, drought and increasing environmental degradation. Moreover, women believe deeply in a clean and healthy environment, and are therefore enthusiastic campaigners and workers for the environment movement.

40. SEWA has effectively implemented water campaigning activities in these districts. Roof rainwater-harvesting tanks have been constructed in both districts, and watershed development activities have been successfully completed under different programmes. A very good impact has been achieved in solving the water problem in the area and in creating awareness among the women about water-related problems.

41. The ILWM focuses on integrating watershed development, water harvesting, animal husbandry, the Fodder Bank, the Grain Bank, the Seed Bank (explained below) and forestry and thereby making agriculture more sustainable. Setting up village-level tools and equipment libraries further augments this. Currently 10,000 hectares of land in 40 villages is being regenerated.

### **Feminize our Forest Campaign - campaign for forest workers**

42. Women have been forest and nursery workers and collectors of minor forest produce for years. However, they have not received the technical support and services that they require. On the other hand, it is they who are the worst sufferers in the increasing ecological degeneration and land degradation at the local level. In addition, some policies of the Government's Forest Department, including its own nursery raising, are an impediment to women's employment. These policies are not only a hindrance but also result in declining incomes for the poorest of the women who depend on forest and nursery raising for survival. In this context, SEWA has initiated a national and state level campaign to "feminize the forests". This campaign has helped in creating awareness about the ecology and has helped in building the capacity of members for raising saplings and also for planting trees. To solve issues relating to employment in nurseries, plantation groups have been formed. Groups help in the impartial and sustainable growth of nurseries and plantations. Awareness generation within the group helps to encourage optimum use of nurseries and fodder farms.

### **The Food Security Campaign**

43. The second major problem identified in the gram sabhas is the unavailability of food grains. Most of the villages, and especially the poor, rely on the ration shops for their food needs; most villages do not have their own ration shops but have to rely on those 3-4 kilometres away. Even there, as the villagers say, "Whenever we go, there is a shortage of all items: grains, sugar, oil, kerosene." In the campaign for adequate coverage of ration shops, adequate supply in them and alternatives to the ration shops, village women flood the civil supplies authorities with demands for adequate and timely supplies, ration cards and the type of supplies they require.

### **Policy - advocacy initiatives**

44. SEWA aims at reaching out to the far outlying resource-poor border villages. Lack of water, as stated above, is leading to advancing deserts, reduced tree cover and deteriorating soil conditions. This aggravates the problem of potable drinking water and lack of fuel and fodder for livelihoods, which affects the women more adversely. SEWA recognized the importance of forestry and related activities and has initiated the Feminize our Forests and Water Campaigns since 1995 with the aim of transferring these activities into the hands of the local women.

45. SEWA members are keen to nurture and revive the forests and common lands. They develop nurseries, raise saplings and thus green their villages while earning income from these activities. Women instil respect for the forests in adolescent girls and young children. SEWA also believes that those who collect minor forest produce should have the right to sell this in the open market, and not be restricted to selling to the Government's Forest Corporation. In addition, the campaign promotes the idea that if village women raise saplings, they can regenerate the forests of their villages and preserve and rejuvenate their natural environment.

## Impact of SEWA's initiatives

46. SEWA's works in drylands has contributed towards the two main objectives of SEWA, viz. (1) Full employment i.e. women have assured income, food and social security, and (2) Self reliance for women individually and collectively, economically and in terms of making their own decisions. The impact of SEWA's contributions have been assessed as follows:

1. Prevention of land degradation
2. Prevention of soil erosion
3. Development of agricultural activities
4. Income generation
5. Eradication of poverty
6. Financial sustainability
7. Managerial sustainability
8. Checking migration
9. Capacity-building of the communities.

## 3. Recommendations

- Issues of women in drylands must be specifically linked to programmes of socio-economic development in various states and countries. This recognition must be reflected in national/state policies and strategies.
- It is important to view livelihood issues for women in drylands in a holistic manner. This implies that livelihood should not be perceived as an issue in income generation. It needs to be recognized that several socio-cultural aspects have their impact on income-generating capability, e.g. childcare facilities, health conditions, image of self, micro-finance services in credit and insurance, and infrastructural facilities such as market access, water and electricity.
- Need for coordinated effort: Perceiving livelihood in a holistic manner would call for participation from a large number of agencies and organizations, e.g. different departments and ministries of Government, community organizations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), etc. A very efficient system of coordination among all these departments and divisions will be required.
- Role of development agencies: Such agencies must acquire proper understanding of the problems of women in drylands. Concern for such women must be reflected in the priorities of such agencies. It is necessary that they develop suitable indicators of performance evaluation that would focus on the qualitative and non-financial parameters of development projects in dryland areas.
- Role of NGOs: Because of their understanding of the issues and their rapport with local communities, NGOs are most suited for facilitating programme implementation. It is necessary that all of them coordinate their respective activities, with livelihood security at the centre.
- Capacity-building – the real solution: When it comes to the creation of sustainable livelihoods, capacity building is the long but sure way to achieve the desired impact. In the context of dryland areas, capacities need to be built in certain specific areas, e.g. earthquake resistance, water management, resource utilization, and the revival and strengthening of traditional skills with a potential for commercial utilization.
- Private sector organizations as a resource: Governments and NGOs have different but specific roles. Both of them lack business acumen and mindset. Experience has shown that certain business systems and practices used in private sector organizations are of relevance for the development of women in drylands, e.g. financial/accounting systems, marketing orientation, systems for managing activities in vast areas, discipline in decision-making and implementation.
- It is necessary that Governments frame policies that will attract participation from private sector organizations. Similarly NGOs should develop ways and means of linking their strengths at grassroots level with efficient systems used by such organizations.
- It is necessary that international organizations engaged in development create opportunities and platforms for the exchange of experiences and the development of action plans.

#### **4. Conclusion**

47. At a time when poverty reduction is assuming greater significance, such initiatives in the context of women in the drylands will also receive increasing attention. While development agencies such as this one are taking global initiatives with regard to water, it is important to continue and strengthen initiatives by other agencies through clear vision and effective inter-agency coordination.

48. Governments will have a greater role to play through proper linkage of the needs of women in drylands with national policies and planning. This is a strategic issue, which could help Governments in ensuring fruitful participation by NGOs, community-based organizations and various development agencies.

49. Finally it must be remembered that the capacity-building of women in drylands is the true solution. Any effort and initiative towards building their organizing capability will go a long way towards providing sustainable livelihoods to such women.

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