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# Rapid appraisal for women in the North West frontier of Pakistan

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### • The project

The Malakand Social Forestry Project (MSFP) is a project of the Forest Department of the North West Frontier Province (NWFP) of Pakistan, supported by the Netherlands Government. The project commenced in 1987 and covers the Malakand Agency, some 952 sq km of mainly mountain with narrow inner valleys. There are no major urban centres. About half of the project area consists of steep, barren hillsides which are communally owned and covered with sparse grass and shrub vegetation, and devoid of any trees. Apart from its reforestation activities, the project has sought to form village organisations (village development committees or VDC'S) which it is hoped will eventually initiate and manage village development activities.

An important target group for the project is village women, who are the actual users of fuelwood, and also responsible for the stall-feeding of animals. In 1989 the project felt it was ready to initiate a Women's Programme. Little was known, however, about the role and status of women in the project area, or how effectively to organise them for the Programme. As the Women's Programme had already commenced there was an urgent need to obtain this information in a timely manner, as well as get a feel for the needs of the women, and gauge the reactions of the community to the Programme. Without this diagnostic information, serious mistakes could be made in the implementation of the Women's Programme, which could set the whole project back. Consequently, I was asked to conduct a Rapid Appraisal exercise prior to the actual launching of the "stoves"

component, which was to serve as an entry-point for the Programme.

### • The area

The NWFP region is inhabited by Pathan tribes, following the Pathan code or Pukhtoonwali. The purdah system is normally followed, severely restricting access to women and their mobility. It is only possible for female project staff or researchers to have access to village women under these socio-cultural circumstances. Any interaction of local women with male outsiders would be considered an affront to the honour of men, so jeopardizing the whole project. It is also generally wise to be sensitive to the nuances of the Pukhtun code of conduct, especially as revenge for any real or imagined wrong is the first commandment of the Pukhtoonwali!

### • The RRA

As the Female Programme Consultant (FPC) was involved in other aspects of programme design, it was decided that I would conduct the exercise on my own, with the assistance of educated local girls. The FPC, who is a forester, did, however, participate in the exercise for the first three days. The local girls had tentatively been chosen by the FPC as Village Motivators for the Programme, each having been identified by the villagers as educated and capable women. In each village, a girl from that particular village was used. This was extremely helpful, as these girls were familiar with the village, and with all the households in the village. Being accompanied by them meant I had immediate access to any household in the village, and the villagers were more accepting of me. Later the information

gathered was discussed in detail with the male project staff from various disciplinary backgrounds, who could not participate in the exercise, as well as the FPC, the WID (Women in Development) consultant and the Chief Technical Advisor for the Project.

Programme activities were to start in three or four villages. These had been selected previously by the FPC as suitable villages, on the basis of discussions with project staff and the willingness of villagers to participate in the Women's Programme. These villages were considered to be representative of distinct clusters of villages, some belonging to distinct agro-ecological zones for example. Four villages were to be covered over a period of eight days, allowing two days for each village.

An initial checklist of issues was drawn up by the FPC and myself prior to the first village visit, and was modified after the visit. The checklist was geared towards getting information that would be directly relevant to the Programme, and focused on the proposed programme components which were:

- creation of village level institutions
- savings and credit programme
- introduction of fuel saving and appropriate technology
- income generating activities within the social forestry sector (fruit and forest nurseries, vegetable gardens)
- management and development of fodder crops
- poultry development
- human resource development (skill training in vegetables, fruit, poultry, accounting, forestry etc)

The checklist concentrated on information about the socio-economic status of the household; the mobility of the women and their participation in agriculture; women's daily and seasonal routines; fuel collection, usage and availability; livestock and fodder; vegetable growing; poultry; and savings and expenditures in the household. These issues were investigated in depth, to try and ascertain problems, needs, decision-making patterns etc associated with them. The checklist was flexible, and allowed us to talk around each subject. At this stage secondary data sources,

eg village baseline surveys, literature on women in the NWFP etc, were also studied. Members of the male VDC's had been notified that this exercise was going to be carried out, as I felt the approval of the men was crucial. We also spent our first moments in the village notifying the men of our arrival, and explaining exactly what we were going to do. This served as our introduction into the village, and also facilitated access to the women.

Initially, male key informants (VDC members, school-teachers, leaders, elders) were asked general questions about the history and problems of the villagers, and the social and geographical organisation of the village. Agricultural calendars and seasonal patterns of vegetable and fruit growing were also discussed with them, as was fuel and fodder availability. Men were asked what they thought the problems of the women might be, and what one could do about them. This gave the male perspective on. The different issues under consideration, which was important for the success of the programme. These meetings took place in the hujra, which in Pathan society is a room where men congregate. As a female outsider it was acceptable for me to sit there.

After this group discussion one of the men would offer to show me around the village and then his house. The local girl who was to accompany me would be brought over to the house, where I would discuss the checklist with her, and explain to her what I wanted to do. The girls were usually quick to understand what was required, and would be able to deal with the main issues in the checklist on their own. In this way I could listen and observe the women, and interject at relevant points in the discussion.

At this point we would ask if a number of women could be gathered at that house for group discussions. The household where one would be taken to would inevitably be one of the more affluent households. This was in some ways an advantage, as it was found that the poorest women will visit the houses of the affluent, who are often their patrons, while the richer and middle income women will sometimes be reluctant to visit the homes of the poorer women, from whose families they

observe purdah. In this manner it was found that women of all social groups could be gathered for the discussion'. When the women were gathered we would introduce ourselves in the context of the project and what it was trying to do.

While many of the women had heard about the project, they were not very aware of project activities, except when it impacted on them directly, such as where areas had been cordoned off and they were not allowed to graze their animals and collect fuelwood from there. Men had felt that this was a project which related to them only, and had not shared information with the women. This is found to be true in many cases, where project staff mistakenly feel that information imparted to men might filter through to women. This group discussion about the project served as an ice-breaker, and got women talking about their problems and issues.

Following this, discussions were initiated (as with the men) about the social and geographical organisation of the village. Women were asked to construct rough maps showing the geographical/social neighbourhoods in the village. This exercise generated considerable excitement, and it was found that despite their limited mobility, women did manage to sketch fairly accurately the lay-out of their village. The discussions on the socio-geographical organisation of the village was crucial to the social organisation of the women. As each set of questions relating to different sectors was completed, the women were told about the various Programme components relevant to those questions to obtain some idea of their receptiveness to the various concepts being put forward, and to bring up some of the problems that these "packages" might encounter. Often a lively discussion would ensue, with the women arguing about why and why not a particular activity might be suitable for them. The ideas being put forward were very new to them, as previously their exposure was limited to crafts programmes, or immunization or population planning workers.

The group discussion was concluded by asking the women to identify households in different income classes and in different geographical neighbourhoods in the village so that

household level discussions could take place the next day. This was a tricky exercise as essentially we were asking the villagers to rank households into poor, middle-income and rich categories, as we did not have the time to do so. This was done by the villagers on the basis of land-holdings. Land has a great deal of value in Pathan society and in many cases those who don't own any land are referred to as ghareeb (lit. poor). In most cases the women were anxious to point out the extreme poor, and neighbourhoods on the fringes of the villages where the extreme poor were sometimes clustered. Where there were distinct social groups present in the village who might be "different" from the others, attempts were made to visit their households as well, e.g. the gujars or pastoralists, many of whom have settled into the villages, or the occupational classes, eg barbers, priests or mulesters, etc.

The next stage of research was spent in holding household level discussions and in walking through the different neighbourhoods in the village. We did not have the time to walk with the women to their fuel source which was often located several hours away on the hillsides, but it became evident that there were sources of fuel within the village as well. Attempts were made to visit the different fuel sources or grazing sites which might be present within the village, and to observe women in the field while walking through the village wherever possible. The information gathered from the household level interviews was used to build up portraits of households, which proved extremely useful in giving us some idea of household dynamics and the differing needs of different socio-economic groups.

#### • **Interesting findings from the RRA and strengths of the approach**

It was found from accounts of oral history that deforestation in the area had taken place amongst other things due to the abolition of feudal authority and decline in the traditional authority of the jirga (tribal council). Where ownership rights were brought into question and forest revenues were to be shared with the state, the people staked their claims on what they felt rightfully belonged to them. The Wali

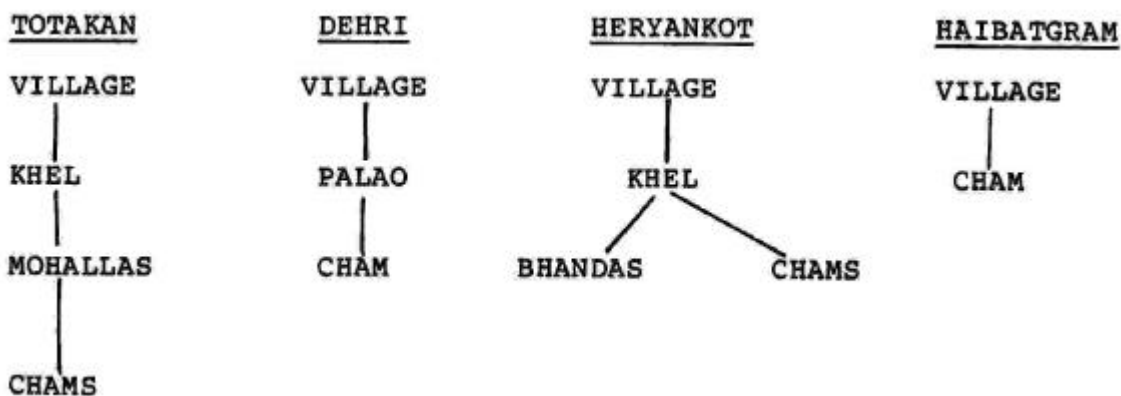
or Swat, (the traditional feudal leader) the villagers say, had such control over the forest resources that the locals claimed that they would have to report even a branch of a tree cut in their own courtyard!

Discussions and accounts of oral history revealed that villages were organised into social/geographical units along lineage patterns. The khel or kandey are the line descendents of the clans that originally settled the village (Figure 1). These are further broken down to mohallas, palaos or chams, which are geographical neighbourhoods, inhabited originally by one family (khel). Over the years as families grew and land was divided, some families grew richer and others poorer. Thus each neighbourhood became inhabited by a number of economic groups. In addition to this other social groups also moved in (eg occupational castes). Thus each neighbourhood, though originally based on one family, now consists of a number of social/economic groups. This information was of great interest to the Project.

Men in the village have a formal meeting place (hujra), and formal and informal meetings for men do take place frequently to discuss problems and issues relevant to the village and individuals. Women meet on a more informal basis, and due to purdah restrictions their mobility is restricted anyway. It is difficult to get women to congregate for a group meeting

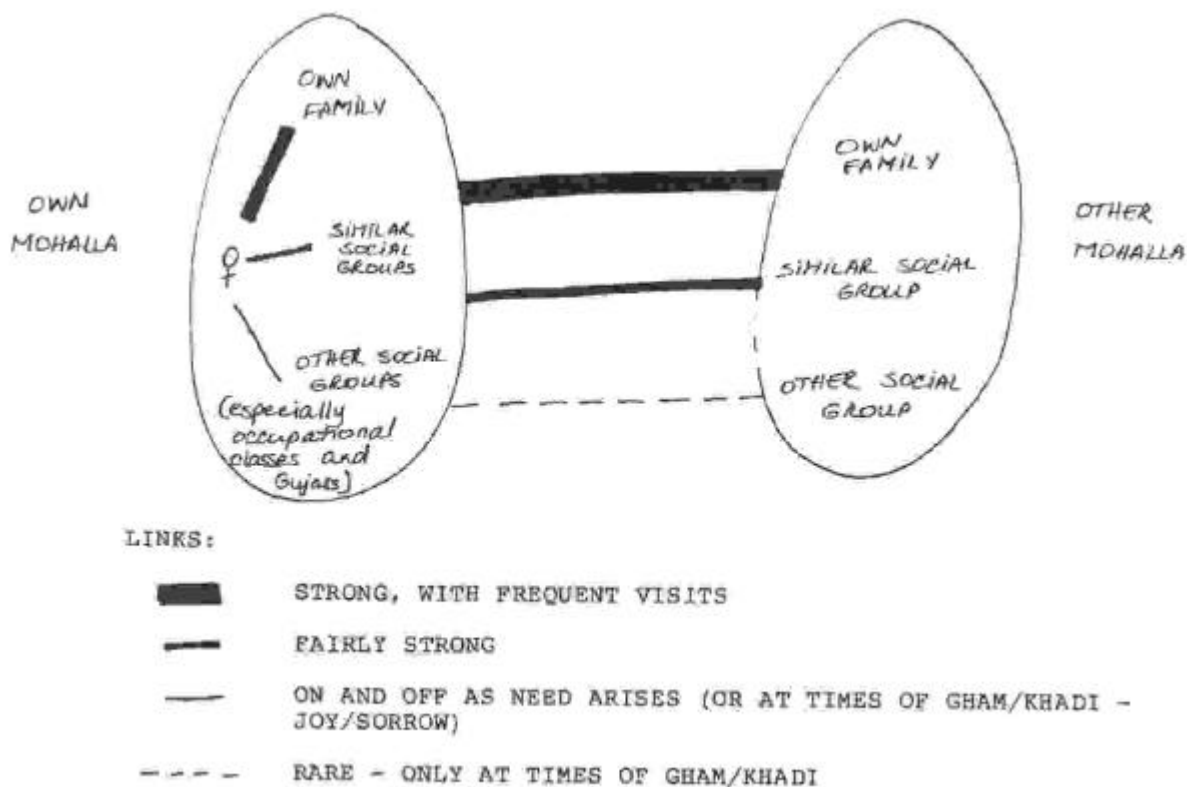
as they all have different schedules and there is no one period during the day which they all have free. To get women from the whole village to meet and organise into women's organisations would be extremely difficult. It was found that the convenient unit of organisation was the neighbourhood. Given their common descent, relationships are strongest among women in a mohalla, and women are most mobile in their own mohalla (Figure 2). It thus seemed logical to recommend that this be the basis of the social organisation of the women. Women will visit other neighbourhoods with varying frequency, and are most comfortable with visiting homes of similar socio-economic status. While pukhtoons (line descendents of original settlers and original owners of all the land) will be comfortable with meeting each other and people of similar socio-economic status, purdah restrictions prevent them from visiting households of gujars (pastoralists) or occupational classes. These classes will, however, often visit and be comfortable in the houses of the rich. This information on social dynamics and spatial layout of the village was crucial to developing an effective programme which would reach all segments of the society, and in discovering geographical areas where the extreme poor were clustered (eg bhandas or neighbourhoods on the outskirts of the villages).

Figure 1. Models of social organisation in four villages of Malakand agency, NWFP



- KHEL:** Kandey-line descendants of clans
- MOHALLAS:** Khel/Kandans originally family based
- PALAO:** Family-based but now comprising all socio-economic groups,, rich, poor, outsiders and occupational classes
- Sizes:**
- Khel 100 +/- households
  - Bhandas small neighbourhoods on periphery of village
  - Palao a neighbourhood of 25-30 households
  - Cham smaller units of 4-5 households

Figure 2. Model of social relations between women



The combination of group and household level discussions was found to be particularly effective. Group level talks gave an overview of the situation and needs of the women (arguments and discussions in groups can be quite revealing), while the household level interviews helped to engage women who might not be vocal in group discussions in the process. The needs of different social and economic groups also became more explicit in the household level interviews. Most women felt more comfortable to discuss issues in greater depth in the privacy of their own homes, in their own environment, especially issues related to income and expenditures. Most were keen to extend hospitality and physically show their cooking arrangements, fuel usage etc. They would get even more involved in the exercise when we asked to weigh the amounts of fuelwood burnt- at every meal and to be shown cooking arrangements, livestock sheds, kitchen gardens etc. It also helped us to see their homes and families and be able to hold more detailed discussions with them. The level and detail of information gathered in the household can be extremely useful.

It was pointless asking the men what activities the women engaged in, as inevitably the answer was "nothing". Again, it reflected on male honour if you even suggested that their women were doing any "work". The way around this problem in some cases was to actually mention the kind of work eg "who feeds the livestock", in which case they would admit that the women did that. When asked what one could do to help the women out, their answer was often limited to "open a sewing centre". This was not only true of the men, but also of the women, who could only think of sewing" when asked what income generating projects they might like to do. This perhaps follows from the traditional approach of Governmental and other organisations in dealing with women's projects. These women have had little exposure to anything outside the realm of "handicrafts projects", and consequently are unable to envisage themselves doing anything else. It was also found that while many educated girls wanted paid employment, the need was for flexible jobs, within the village, for it to be socially acceptable.

While a vegetable growing "package" had been developed for the Programme, it was found that women's role in vegetable growing and kitchen gardening was minimal. This is not true of other areas of Pakistan (eg Northern Areas) where women are responsible for vegetable growing. Women were not receptive to growing vegetables in their courtyards as they felt that children and scavenging poultry would not allow this, and anyway the men were already growing vegetables for marketing and home-consumption. Thus the pre-formulated package proved to be unsuitable for this area, and it became clear that traditions vary from area to area (and even from village to village) It is essential to be sensitive to these variations.

It was found that women had a significant role and control in decision-making with regard to livestock and poultry. These often also provided a source of income over which the women had control. Productivity in this sector was found to be extremely low, and it was recommended that this be one of the priority areas for the project to involve itself in.

While fuel-efficient stoves were a very popular concept, the idea of collective or neighbourhood bakeries which had proved popular amongst other fuel-conserving projects in the NWFP, proved (surprisingly) to not be popular in this area. The women preferred to bake their bread in their own homes at their own convenience. It was recommended that this idea be approached again at a later stage in the project.

It helped in some ways to carry out the exercise in the context of the project, as people felt that we had something concrete to deliver, and were more interested in the whole process. This did however also lead to the problem of raising expectations.

#### **• Problems encountered and weaknesses of approach**

The RRA should have been carried out before the programme packages were put together.

Cultural sensitivity is crucial in approaching women as well as in interpreting answers to questions. Of ten when we asked how many children there were in a household, we were

only told the number of sons, as daughters are not considered so relevant!

Lack of time meant that the information and results could not be discussed with the villagers.

A slightly larger, multi-disciplinary team might have been able to gain greater insight to the issues - it was difficult for one person to handle all aspects of the exercise.

Raising expectations - this happens even if you are just asking questions and not promising anything. Villagers have a habit of feeling you can solve all their problems. In this case one has to be sensitive but firm, and let them know what you cannot do for them. Previous visits by, project staff meant that the villagers were expecting the Women's Programme to actually start now and they could not understand the delay. The villagers felt that I now had the power to get things going, and they had to be convinced that I did not.

Tendency of local females assisting in the exercise to answer the questions on their own or prompt the women. Greater time was required to train the Female Village Motivators.

Tendency of Female Motivators to promise the women all nature of things that the Programme could not deliver, in their eagerness to convince them of the "worth" of the Programme. It was useful that this became evident at this stage so women could be properly trained before the Programme was actually initiated. Similarly these women were themselves not entirely convinced by the Programme and this also became evident as the exercise progressed. It was also noticed that the Female Motivators were reluctant to visit some of the poorer households. It was recommended that these women be given appropriate training before allowing them to continue. If false expectations were built up on either side there could be disastrous results for the Programme. It was also recommended that they be given appropriate support, eg chaperones to accompany them.

People who launch into long speeches as they feel they have to be spokesperson to communicate the needs of the community

(invariably exaggerated) - they have to be tactfully interrupted.

Tendency of one person to dominate the discussion in groups and household level discussions - this is to some extent solved by going to visit women (e.g. the poorer women) in their own households. Within a household this problem can be solved by taking a person aside or asking them to show you a part of the house or the livestock shed and questioning them away from the others. In the case of poorer women their richer patrons will often answer for them. As they tend to employ them for various purposes in their households or have other dealings with them, their information is often accurate but this situation can be avoided by visiting individual households as stated above.

The rich wanting to "hijack" you to their houses. You have to be very firm in insisting that you want to go to the poorer households as well.

Giving direction to the group discussions where all women tended to speak at the same time.

Tendency of villagers to feel that you should be giving them handouts. It is hard to get them to start thinking about what they can do for themselves. They are normally quite clear about their needs but have to be focussed. You have to be quite clear about the issues you are able to deal with, and ways in which the project can help them.

Male hostility when you questioned them on work that their women engaged in, the general response was "women don't work". This could to some extent be overcome by not using the word "work", and talking about the different activities such as livestock care etc. Men were most resentful when you questioned them about agricultural work that their women might be engaged in, as this is considered in the MQFP to be the male domain, and it would be going against the system of purdah to allow women to work in the field. In most cases, even if women are working in the fields, the first response from both women and men is to deny this. It takes a certain amount of probing and tactful discussion before the role of women in agriculture can be ascertained.

Over-zealous males who took too great an interest in the process and wanted to follow us everywhere as well as answer all the questions aimed at the women (“what will she be able to tell you, why don’t you ask me”?). It is important to keep men away when talking to the women. Apart from interference, women were considerably inhibited in the presence of men, and gave the answers they felt they should be giving. In one case a farmer who happened to be home when I was talking to the women in his household became highly irate when I was questioning the women about their role in agriculture, claiming they did nothing, while the women were actually involved in bringing home the grain and cleaning it in front of us. At the end however he smiled and said “don’t be unhappy”, a traditional Pathan saying to ensure you have not offended a guest!

Excessive time spent in “hospitality”. This is unavoidable in Pathan society where hospitality or *melmastia* is a crucial part of the *Pukhtoonwali*. It would be a major offence if you refused tea or a proffered meal. This is not however entirely undesirable as I have found that a great deal of information can be gathered in an informal discussion over a cup of tea in both households and offices in the NWFP and in Pakistan in general. In fact this information is often more revealing as questionnaires tend to make people more “official” in their responses. If one employs the Western approach of asking questions and leaving, you tend to get less information. It is far more effective sometimes to engage in social chitchat to a certain extent to establish a rapport and throw the relevant questions in between.

## • Conclusions

The RRA’ proved to be a useful exercise in giving an overview of social dynamics and the role of women in the area, and clearing misconceptions about what was feasible in the

project area. It served a dual purpose in investigating the role of women, and introducing them to the Programme at the same time. This was a two-way learning process, as we learnt an enormous amount from the women, and their awareness of issues and what they could be achieving was also enhanced. It was especially interesting to be attempting such an exercise in an area where strict *purdah* was operating, and the mobility of women was very restricted. For most women it was the first time they had been gathered for a group discussion and given a chance to discuss their needs and problems. Although the exercise was carried out with minimal time and resources and could not employ RRA tools optimally, it did allow us to gain insights which helped in making a more effective Programme. The exercise was particularly relevant in that its findings were incorporated in the design and implementation of the Women’s Programme, and the Female Village Motivators who were to later implement the Programme were also included in the exercise. In a way this trained them in understanding the Programme and in introducing it to the villagers, and also in understanding the problems and issues which were of relevance in the village.

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