

growing relative inequality, if not absolute poverty, for both women and men. Equality for women is not made visible within those existing economic, political and cultural processes that separate resources, power and control from large sections of people. But neither is development possible without greater equity and participation for women.

Our vision of feminism, born of our experience as activists and analysts, has at its very core a process of economic and social development geared to human needs through wider access to economic and political power. Equality, peace and development by and for the poor and oppressed are inextricably interlinked with equality, peace and development by and for women.

Our main audience in this document is women – those who have, through this past decade and longer, attempted in practical and analytical ways to come to grips with the implications of such a vision. Indeed, the actions undertaken by women themselves, individually and through organizations, have provoked the most exciting and potentially most promising events of the last decade. Women have come together in organizations, networks, and movements. They have sought to tackle problems of income and employment, and to alter the ways in which society, governments, international institutions, men and women themselves, evaluate women's works. They have struggled to bring the basic survival of human beings and the right to live in dignity to the forefront of consciousness,

to organize against military repression and militarization, and in a host of other ways. It is women, therefore, who have been the catalysts behind many of the actions of governments, agencies, and others during the last ten years.

It is important for us in the women's movement to understand and acknowledge our own achievements and strengths. We are living in a time when the ideological climate and mood are more gloomy regarding the prospects for peace and for genuine human and economic development than they were at the start of the decade. It is easy to be pessimistic about the concrete achievements of the past years in improving women's economic and social position. They appear to have been as meagre as the resources that agencies and governments have actually directed to women. But why not look at our experiences in another way? We know now from our own research how deeply ingrained and how far back historically the subordination of women goes. What we have managed to do in the last few years is to forge world-wide networks and movements as never before to transform that subordination and in the process to break down other oppressive structures as well. Only women know how hard they have had to struggle within their own families and communities to achieve the personal autonomy that fuels and builds upon wider socio-economic change. Starting from little knowledge and training, and having to challenge the full social, economic, and psychological weight of gender (and often class,

national, and ethnic) oppression, we have acquired skills and self confidence, and the capacity for change.

While it is to such a process of ongoing self-empowerment that this document is dedicated, many of the issues raised here, the analysis, and strategies proposed are for the consideration and action of agencies and governments as well. But we realise from our experiences of the past decade that the political will for serious action by agencies is contingent upon women organising to promote change. We need, therefore, to clarify our role in affecting the major social and economic issues of our times, and to assess the successes, failures and potential of our organizations. We do this with the recognition that few large movements of our times have the mass potential, the freshness of vision, the courage to experiment with new methods for action, and the respect for adversity and challenge that the women's movement does. It is time for us to assert with clarity, rigor and passion.

The full text of this presentation was written by Gita Sen with Caren Grown. Collaborating agencies and organisations in the DAWN project include the African Association of Women for Research and Development (AAWORD), Dakar, Senegal; the Women and Development Unit at the University of the West Indies (WAND), Barbados; the Asian and Pacific Development Centre (APDC), Malaysia; and the Chr Michelsen Institute (CMI), Norway. The DAWN project can be contacted through: Devlaki Jain, SMM Theatre Crafts Museum, 5 Deen Dayal Upadhyay Marg., New Delhi 11002, India.

Seeking Refuge ...

I want to fly
but have no wings.
I want to build
a cosy nest — all my own
but do not have
even dried up sticks.
My life melts away
in dependence and obligation.
Every kind deed —
reminds me of my stateless state.
I seek refuge from —
being a refugee.

(December 1985, London, England.)

Sudha Coomarasamy



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