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Education for Women's Empowerment

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CHAPTER 1

ASPBAE'S DECLARATION ON EDUCATION FOR WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT, APRIL 1994

I PREAMBLE:

This statement is the outcome of several participatory processes which have spanned a significant period of time and involved women from the adult education movement from across the Asia South Pacific Region. We hope and believe that it reflects the key concerns, and targets certain critical issues for action in a region whose geographic spread encompasses countries and peoples representing an incredible diversity and plurality - ethnic, economic, social, cultural and political.

From the highly developed countries like Japan and Australia, across the newly emergent economic 'Tigers' of Southeast Asia, to the still developing countries of South Asia, the situations and concerns are understandably varied and equally complex.

Women in this region have come through socialisation processes which are culturally and educationally vastly disparate. However, the collective experience of these women reaffirms the growing realisation that their Gender, together with variables such as caste, class, ethnicity, race and religion, is the primary source of their continuing marginalisation and discrimination in every sphere of human endeavour.

Recognising the need to struggle against the structures which create barriers to their taking an equal role in society, the crucial role of education needs to be redefined and emphasised.

This is especially significant in the context of the Delhi Declaration of December, 1993, wherein heads of state of the nine most populous developing countries - five of whom are in Asia - have called for urgent action to end illiteracy, provide education for every child and to end all discrimination based on Gender.

The 'FORWARD LOOKING STRATEGIES' of the Nairobi Conference emphasised the critical role of Education as a fundamental tool for the 'full promotion and improvement of the status of women'. However, decades of efforts to enhance women's access and participation in education have failed to raise women from conditions of Poverty, Inequality and Discrimination, except for a small and generally powerful and visible minority, who have scaled heights in many new spheres.

All talk of EMPOWERMENT becomes meaningless in the face of given realities which continue to perpetuate feudal and patriarchal value systems regardless of the existence of substantial and radical-sounding policy statements and legislation. In many countries, even these constitutional

promises do not exist. A basic definition of the concept of **EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN** is therefore an essential first step.

II DEFINING EMPOWERMENT - A FIRST STEP

The process of Empowerment is an ongoing struggle to challenge existing systemic inequalities between men and women in society. Restoration of equal relationships therefore implies a total redistribution of resources. Such redistribution should ensure the powerless and marginalised - especially women - access to, and control over natural, material, economic, political, social and cultural resources, keeping in mind the principles of sustainable development, social justice and peace.

Some fundamental elements of empowerment and social justice for women include :

- a. the right to life of the girl child.
- b. the right to security without fear of violence.
- c. the right to define, reclaim and determine her own history, ethnicity, religion and culture.
- d. the right to basic needs of food, shelter, health, education, work, and an equal share in property as intrinsic to assuring her personal dignity.
- e. the right to freedom of expression and to make informed choices.
- f. the right to equal participation in decision-making within the family, the workplace and society in general.
- g. the right to information and control over her own body, her sexuality, her productive and reproductive functions.

Any process of empowerment should enable men and women to create and nurture together an alternative vision of the world without discrimination on the basis of class, caste, race, ethnicity and colour, culture, religion or gender. Simply stated, empowerment derives from the full recognition that Women's Rights are Human Rights.

IDENTIFYING THE BARRIERS

Barriers to Empowerment are visible at the international, national and regional levels in the structures and institutions such as development policies, international trade and debt, structural adjustment programmes, and in the family, the educational system, religio-cultural practices and the media.

In short, women - educated or illiterate - continue to face male domination and control both within and outside the home, under the system termed patriarchy. Poor and marginalised women in the least developed countries, bear a double burden.

Every sector today, from the State and U.N. Bodies, to NGOs and Peoples Movements, recognises that Education forms one of the fundamental pillars of bringing about change and transformation in the situation affecting women. The time has

clearly come for concerted and combined action to effectively give teeth to countless Resolutions and Policy statements, by operationalising them on the ground within a timebound framework.

III EDUCATION - A KEY TO GENDER JUSTICE & SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION

The canvas of issues is vast and unlimited; the agenda for action extensive. It is necessary to identify certain key issues and a broad strategy of implementation, which can be prioritised appropriate to local situations and needs.

KEY ISSUES

1. UNIVERSALISATION OF PRIMARY EDUCATION - ESPECIALLY IN SOUTH ASIA.
2. ADULT LITERACY, CONTINUING EDUCATION, AND CHILD SUPPORT PROGRAMMES FOR WOMEN.
3. EDUCATION ON BASIC RIGHTS AND WOMEN'S RIGHTS WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF THE UN CONVENTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS.
4. EDUCATION FOR SELF RELIANCE AND SUSTAINABILITY.
5. CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION - FROM PRIMARY SCHOOL AND GRASS ROOTS UNITS OF GOVERNANCE UPWARDS.
6. EDUCATION ON REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH - INCLUDING SEX EDUCATION, REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES.

NGO REGIONAL PLAN ON EDUCATION FOR WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

The Working Group on Education and Culture at the ESCAP Regional NGO Symposium held in Manila, November, 1993, drafted a comprehensive resolution and made a series of recommendations for a Regional Plan of Action in Education for Women's Empowerment. A summary of the recommendations will provide an overview of the range and depth of issues and concerns articulated by NGO representatives of twenty nations of the Asia South Pacific Region.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- i. Policy formulation, implementation, monitoring, evaluation.
- ii. Ensure every child's right to education through Universalisation of Primary Education - especially S.Asia
- iii. Assure free & compulsory education upto secondary level
- iv. Accord highest priority to Education through allocation of adequate resources as per UN norms
- v. Provide for 'positive discrimination' in favour of girl child for a stipulated period of time
- vi. Actively mobilise all sectors of society in partnership for operationalising all of the above

- vii. Ensure accountability in usage of funds
- viii Provide adequate funds and visibility for Literacy, Post Literacy, Continuing Education and Child Support for Women
- ix. Education for Basic Rights & Women's Rights to be compulsory
- x. Citizenship Education & Education for Self Reliance also part of core curriculum at all levels.
- xi. Education on Reproductive Health, including Sex Education, Reproductive Rights and Responsibilities to be included in all levels of curriculum for both sexes.

IV IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES

While documents, declarations and resolutions have repeatedly stressed much of the foregoing in several World Forums, the operationalisation on the ground remains slow and faltering. Clearly there is a need today to SPELL OUT AND PUT INTO PLACE strategies for action which are clear and feasible. These include:

- i. CREATION OF INSTITUTIONAL MECHANISMS - for eg. building up Human Resource Development and Gender Training Cells in every Government Department, and also in other concerned institutions.
- ii. AWARENESS RAISING - on gender, democracy & development
- iii. BUILDING CRITICAL CAPABILITY AND CONTROL - inculcating the capacity for analytical, critical thinking, and self-determination, as a key learning outcome from primary school upwards.
- iv. PEDAGOGUY, CONTENT, TRAINING & MATERIAL DEVELOPMENT - gender perspective in all materials; training & gender sensitisation of personnel.
- v. DECENTRALISATION & DEMOCRATISATION OF EDUCATION - while the State has the primary overall responsibility for education, local communities, and particularly women, must be involved.
- vi. INTEGRATION OF TRADITIONAL SYSTEMS OF KNOWLEDGE
- vii. WOMEN, SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY - redressing the specific marginalisation of women in access to skills in science & technology
- viii POVERTY, STRUCTURAL ADJUSTMENT, & IMPACT ON EDUCATION - interested NGOs/ others must play a watchdog role in view of increasing state withdrawal & privatisation.

- ix. EDUCATION, MEDIA & TECHNOLOGY - harnessing state of the art technologies and materials for education at all levels.
- x. FUTURE DIRECTIONS - MICRO TO MACRO - THE ROLE OF ADVOCACY

V. AGENDA 2000 - PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION

If recent assurances by political leadership is to result in any changes, a new and dynamic role is clearly demanded of all those who work in the entire sector of activism and education. Clearly any strategy for implementation will have to be prepared keeping in mind short-term and long-term goals, with a mid-term review and evaluation involving several sets of actors.

New implementation strategies visualise the putting in place of clearly formulated action plans which must be decentralised down to the local units at the grass roots level. Thus alone is there a genuine possibility that there will be implementation and follow up on the ground.

LONG TERM ACTION IDEAS

- a. Promotion of attitudinal changes to women's participation in non-traditional Sectors - Education and Employment
- b. Impact assessment of State Policy, Resource Allocation and Implementation - use of Participatory Methodology in Research.
- c. Setting targets for greater participation and visibility of women in all sectors of national activity. Evolving mechanisms for ongoing monitoring and evaluation.

REGIONAL ORGANISATIONS LIKE SAARC AND ASEAN WILL HAVE TO BE ACTIVATED. MOST CRITICAL TO THIS EFFORT WILL BE THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE WOMEN THEMSELVES CAN PLAY A ROLE IN CREATING A DEMAND FOR ACTION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PLEDGES MADE AT ALL LEVELS.

SHORT TERM ACTION PLANS SHOULD INCLUDE:

- a. Development of a five year plan by a special panel comprising NGOs, the State, UN and other Bilateral Agencies.
- b. Interacting with existing/traditional local bodies.
- c. Establishment of Needs Analysis, Monitoring and Evaluation Units which would include People's Representatives, NGOs and the State.
- d. Introduction of Gender Sensitisation Programmes at several levels; the Policy Makers ie the State machinery; Donors & Funders; NGOs and development personnel; Community and grassroots bodies.

- e. Identifying agencies/individuals with experience and expertise to prepare curriculum, provide orientation and teacher training, produce materials for formal and non-formal systems alike.
- f. Survey & Audit of available expertise and material
- g. Defining Guidelines for Gender Sensitive Funding Policies

ABOVE ALL, THERE IS NEED TO SET IN MOTION AN UNPRECEDENTED AND DYNAMIC PROCESS OF ADVOCACY, LOBBYING AND NETWORKING BETWEEN AND AMONG THE REGIONAL, NATIONAL AND LOCAL GROUPS SO AS TO MAINTAIN PRESSURE ON BOTH POLITICAL AND BUREAUCRATIC MACHINERY TO ACT !

IMMEDIATE ACTION

Long and short term objectives notwithstanding, there are certain steps which need to be effected immediately and placed on the Agenda at Beijing:

- a. Demand a minimum allocation of at least 5% of National Resources for Education. Priority in resource utilisation and accountability of State to be monitored.
- b. Identify critical pathways for implementation :
 - * SCHOOLS
 - * NFE CENTRES
 - * ADULT LITERACY PROGRAMMES
 - * WOMEN'S ORGANISATIONS - ESPECIALLY EXISTING/TRADITIONAL WOMEN'S ASSOCIATIONS, GUILDS, SOCIETIES, ETC.
 - * VOLUNTARY AGENCIES / NON GOVERNMENT ORGANISATIONS
 - * COMMUNITY-BASED PEOPLE'S FEDERATIONS / ORGANISATIONS
 - * POLITICAL PARTIES
 - * OFFICIALS AND BUREAUCRACY AT ALL LEVELS
 - * TEACHERS
 - * MEDIA
 - * CORPORATE SECTOR
 - * REGIONAL AND UN BODIES.
- c. Draw up simple, comprehensive, and feasible guidelines for implementation for each of the above mentioned pathways - an 'Easy steps towards Gender Equity' Workbook
- d. Set up National Level Groups comprising a range of NGOs, individuals and others willing to play an active role in advocacy, lobbying and monitoring Gender-related policy implementation measures, within the framework of Education for Women's Empowerment.

VI ACCESSING RESOURCES

Lack of resources has been the common complaint of governments when it comes to investment in Human Resource Development. In fact, there is no dearth of resources - whether human, material or financial. The problem lies in recognising and acting on priorities. Countries which prioritised investment in education, health care and social security for their people before they could achieve their economic miracles, are today able to cope with the impact of Structural Adjustment Policies. By the same token, SAP has failed miserably in those countries which did not provide the fundamental human development inputs to their people. **EVEN TODAY, THERE ARE COUNTRIES THAT SPEND ENORMOUS SUMS OF MONEY ON INTERNATIONAL EXTRAVAGANZAS, WHICH, IF DIVERTED TO EDUCATION COULD PROVIDE SCHOOL BUILDINGS AND TEACHERS SALARIES FOR SEVERAL YEARS !**

EDUCATION AND STRUCTURAL ADJUSTMENT

The world we live in today is witnessing unprecedented social and economic transformation and movement. The Asia Pacific Region is in the process of a massive change, especially with the winds of globalisation and liberalisation sweeping across all ideological and geographic boundaries. In this scenario, there is a critical need to identify new players and new partners who must contribute their resources - human and material (including financial), to ensuring that the above-mentioned goals in education are indeed achieved.

ABOVE ALL IT MUST BE RECOGNISED AND EMPHASISED THAT INVESTMENT IN EDUCATION IS A PRE-CONDITION FOR THE SUCCESS OF STRUCTURAL ADJUSTMENT, BY ENABLING THE MASS OF PEOPLE TO PARTICIPATE MEANINGFULLY IN THE NEW ECONOMIC STRUCTURE.

BUILDING AND OPERATIONALISING NEW COALITIONS

In concrete terms, there is a need to assign clear-cut responsibilities to different sectors, especially the State, whose primary responsibility for education, social justice and gender equity is non-negotiable. Broadly speaking, ASPBAE identifies the following three major sectors who must be accountable for ensuring action in education:

1. THE STATE;
2. LOCAL BODIES (INCLUDING LOCAL SELF-GOVERNMENT INSTITUTIONS) AND COMMUNITY-BASED PEOPLE'S ORGANISATIONS; AND
3. NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATIONS

Apart from the above, there are other important sectors who must be actively mobilised as partners in the educational process. These include:

1. CORPORATE/PRIVATE SECTOR
2. PUBLIC SECTOR,
3. CONSUMER MOVEMENTS,
4. UNIVERSITIES AND ACADEMIC/RESEARCH INSTITUTIONS
5. THE MEDIA
6. CONCERNED INDIVIDUALS,

All of these together must ensure the provision of the following basic necessities which are critical for effective implementation of existing policy in Education.

1. PHYSICAL INFRASTRUCTURE
2. FINANCES
3. PERSONNEL
4. PLANNING
5. CURRICULUM AND MATERIAL DEVELOPMENT
6. INNOVATION/EXPERIMENTATION/RESEARCH
7. MONITORING/EVALUATION/ACCREDITATION
8. HEALTH CARE & CHILD SUPPORT SERVICES

VII. CONCLUSION

We are living in a century which has witnessed unprecedented change and progress, as also unprecedented destruction and violation of Human Rights. In our lifetime, we have witnessed the end of the Cold war, the dismantling of the Berlin Wall, the signing of the Palestine - Israel Accord, and most recently, the historic formal ending of the vicious system of Apartheid. We have watched the world shrink through the miracles of modern communication and information technology. Race, colour, ethnicity - these have been some of our most enduring and sensitive problem areas in the history of humanity. Yet we have been able to find solutions. Poverty and Gender inequity continue to be the intractable issues which we shall in all likelihood carry over into the 21 century.

Today, even organisations like the World Bank, who were once concerned only with economic growth, have condemned 'Gender Inequities' in education, health, employment and poverty as "morally indefensible". They have also decided that "the gender issue is a vital part of the development strategy as well as a matter of Social Justice", in a recently released report.

It was a Chinese philosopher who is supposed to have said:

"If you are thinking of one year, plant rice;
If you are thinking of a decade, plant trees;
If you are thinking of a century, educate the people".

It is time for all nations to recognise that women must be counted as 'people'!

This Fourth World Conference on Women at Beijing offers us an extraordinary opportunity to break down one more barrier to human progress - namely the Gender Barrier. Discrimination and inequality based on Gender transcends, and in a way, also unites women across the world, regardless of their colour, religion and class. Both government and NGO delegations at Beijing are addressing an ever-growing list of problem areas concerning Women and Gender Injustice.

Breaking the Gender barrier will also lead the way to dealing with the lingering concentration of poverty and illiteracy in several parts of the world. ASPBAE submits that the Beijing deliberations must recognise and strengthen the central role of Education for Empowerment of Women at every level.