

FAIR CLIMATE NETWORK ENGENDERING CLIMATE PROJECTS

Contents

1.	FRAMEWORK & CONTEXT	1
2.	FAIR CLIMATE NETWORK	2
2.1.	The Network	2
2.2.	Environmental Services	2
2.3.	Financing Climate Projects	3
2.4.	FCN Standards.....	3
2.5.	Results that can be Measured	3
2.6.	Practical Gender Needs	3
3.	ADATS	4
3.1.	Climate projects at ADATS.....	4
3.2.	Strategic Gender Needs at ADATS	5
4.	A LOSS OF POTENTIAL.....	5
4.1.	Rural Women’s Contribution Stays Untapped.....	6
4.1.1.	NGO Perceptions	6
4.1.2.	Corporates & Communities	6
4.2.	Weak and Unresponsive Repair & Maintenance	6
4.3.	Strategic Response – Embolden & Empower	6
4.4.	Modus Operandi	7
5.	THE PARTH TO EMPOWERMENT.....	7
5.1.	Patriarchy	7
5.2.	Cognitive Dissonance	7
5.3.	Homes & Families	8
5.3.1.	Happy Homes	8
5.3.2.	The Vast Majority	9
5.4.	“Coming-out”	9
5.5.	Unity, an Intuitive Strategy.....	9
5.6.	Home & Enterprise.....	9
5.7.	The Romantic Trap	10
6.	EXTENDING STRATEGIC GENDER BENEFITS ACROSS INDIA	11
6.1.	Capacitating FCN Member NGOs.....	11

6.1.1.	NGO Leaders & Management	11
6.1.2.	Field Staff	12
6.2.	Coverage.....	12
6.3.	NGO Defaults & the Resource Paradigm.....	13
6.3.1.	Charity Funding	13
6.3.2.	Climate Finance	14
6.3.3.	Managing Resources.....	14
6.3.4.	Empowering Rural Women – a Business Investment.....	15
6.4.	Mahila Meetings	15
6.5.	Schooling Children	16
6.6.	Community Health	16
6.6.1.	Pre-primary Health Care	16
6.6.2.	Logistics for Referral Health.....	17
6.6.3.	Reproductive Ailments	17

FAIR CLIMATE NETWORK

ENGENDERING CLIMATE PROJECTS

1. FRAMEWORK & CONTEXT

The “Project” is not Climate Change. It is not biogas, woodstoves, solar panels, or low carbon farming. Neither is it women’s development, community Health, children’s education, sustainable agriculture, alternate credit, or any of the conventional ones we have implemented till now. These are just subsects.

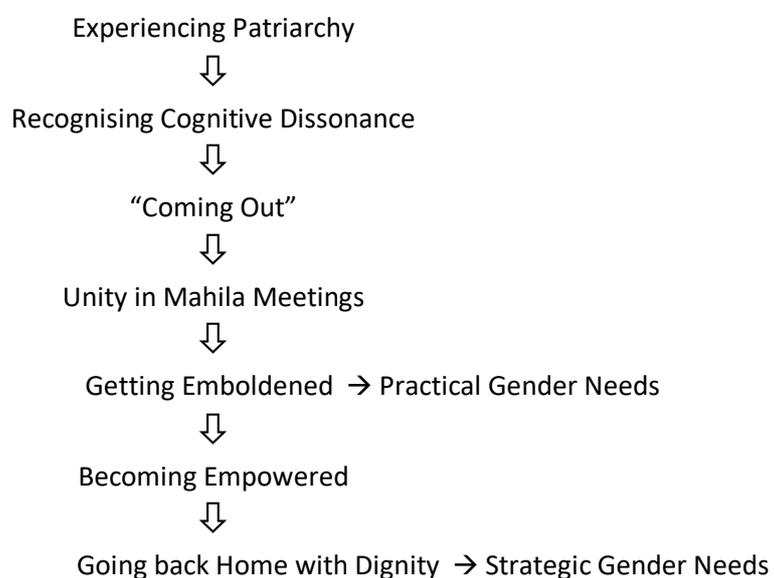
The Project is social transformation.

Social transformation will remain a utopian utterance, without scale and long-term involvement. Climate Projects offer both; an opportunity to reach out to hundreds of thousands of rural poor and stay intimately involved for decades. Social transformation can be achieved only through a bottom up process of dialogue and conversation with the rural poor and, among them, the most disadvantaged, rural women.

We are not saying that emboldened and empowered rural women can, by themselves, transform society. They have to be equal partners with sections of the enlightened intelligentsia, captains of industry, and policy makers.

What we assert is that social transformation is impossible without emboldened and empowered rural women.

When we critically analyse, along with rural women, their forty year long struggle to deal with patriarchy and assert individuality, we see that Unity is their intuitive strategy. We also observe a near identical pattern in more than a thousand villages:



FCN Member NGOs have the opportunity to foster this process in thousands of villages where they work in. By and large, grassroots NGOs are efficient and cost effective in implementing Climate mitigation/adaptation projects. After implementing the technologies, actual usage has to be monitored and the units maintained for 10-21 years. Only then will emission reductions be generated and volumes certified through third party verification. Centralised management followed by NGOs will not work. Biogas units, fuel-efficient Woodstoves and the like are spread over tens of

thousands of families in hundreds of villages. Monitoring, repair and maintenance can be carried out only by End User women themselves.

A hapless lot, crushed through millennia of systematised social oppression, cannot be expected to magically take control of a global effort. They must first feel emboldened, empowered and enabled to take control of their own lives within their own households, which are the traditional bastions of patriarchy.

FCN Member NGOs need to support all and every effort made by rural women to take control of their lives. This cannot be done in the project mode. Empowerment of women has long been an empty platitude, an argument to justify most development efforts with a dash of “gender”. Planned and systemic activities certainly have a critical role to play. But they alone are not enough. A radical alteration of organisational structure and style of functioning is needed. Struggles for dignity, self-respect, recognition and entitlement are not financially expensive. Empowerment does not happen with mere budget realisation.

When effective post-construction/implementation systems are in place, carbon offsets will be generated and translate into carbon revenue. Delivery commitments to carbon investors will be met. After that, revenue will continually be generated to compensate End User women and also maintain the systems/revenue flow. These have to be viewed as instruments for social transformation.

2. FAIR CLIMATE NETWORK

2.1. The Network

The Fair Climate Network is a 11 year old international platform that garners and projects a local environmental take on Climate Change, as experienced by the rural poor who are negatively affected by erratic and unpredictable weather patterns. This view of the changing climate through the prism of their local environment is a powerful driver that sustains the prolonged attention span needed to address adverse effects of Human induced Climate Change.

33 grassroots NGOs have been assisted to develop 38 Climate Projects that solve practical gender problems faced by rural women due to uncertain weather patterns. Together, these Projects will enable 366,369 rural women reduce 855,645 tonnes of Greenhouse Gases every year. As of today, 15 Energy CDM projects are under implementation and 8 are awaiting forward financing through ERPA's.

Women who use domestic Biogas units, for example, stop using non-renewable fossil fuels like firewood, kerosene and charcoal. They cook in a cleaner environment, spend less time in the kitchen, do not have the hassle of collecting firewood, do not suffer from indoor air pollution and, at the same time, contribute to reducing GHG Emissions, which are the cause of global warming.

2.2. Environmental Services

Hundreds of thousands of rural women provide a valuable environmental service that no one else can offer. Enlightened corporate bodies need credible Carbon Offsets to translate/demonstrate their commitment to maintaining Climate integrity. The Fair Climate Network brings both parties together and acts as an aggregator of not just Greenhouse Gas reductions, but also the powerful stories that go behind their generation. Rural women, in this model, are not recipients of benevolent charity; they are business women performing a vital environmental service.

2.3. Financing Climate Projects

FCN helps grassroots NGOs make financial projections in a totally open and transparent manner. We then encourage corporate bodies to audit GHG emissions created by their operations, explore process adaptations to make *Real Reductions*, and then offset the balance by purchasing high quality, *yet-to-be-generated* Certified Emission Reductions (CERs) at the *actual-cost-of-generation*. Corporate investors then enter into Emission Reduction Purchase Agreements (ERPAs) that spell out payment/delivery schedules.

During the 7-8 year ERPA period, when all the CERs are delivered to Carbon Investors, carbon revenue is used for project implementation (55%), repair and maintenance (4%), monitoring, verification and issuance (14%), and staff salaries/field expenses (26%).

In a nutshell, pro-poor and community owned Carbon Projects reduce Greenhouse Gases. Rural women provide an environmental service to society at large. Carbon revenue generated through the sale of these Emission Reductions compensate End User women for this valuable service. Receiving this revenue in advance, before the actual reduction, provides the capex needed to set up the technologies to make the reductions in the first place. Rural women get paid for cooking, cleaning, childcare and other housework in a Climate neutral manner.

2.4. FCN Standards

The Fair Climate Network has 2 uncompromising conditions before we offer support to develop, register, arrange forward financing, and implement Climate Projects:

- i. Community Ownership & Management of Climate Mitigation Projects by the End Users of respective technologies.
- ii. Upfront, open, transparent and legally binding Carbon Revenue sharing agreements between the grassroots NGOs and End User families in the post-ERPA period.

2.5. Results that can be Measured

Climate Mitigation Projects are data driven development efforts based on Objectively Verifiable Indicators and Means of Verification. They are conceived with a defensible calculation of baseline GHG Emissions and conclude with a scientifically valid measurement of Emission Reductions made through the chosen technology. These are certified, at every stage, under international scientific scrutiny by the UNFCCC and/or Gold Standard. The end product is a fungible instrument called a Certified Emission Reduction (CER).

Every single process activity like location, implementation, monitoring and performance is digitally monitored in real time; with unrestricted access to online reports open to the public at large.

Even when it comes to measuring strength of communities or enrichment of biodiversity, serious academic studies are undertaken to prove impact, in addition to powerful verbal testimonies. FCN facilitates these measurement exercises that are undertaken by various universities and scientific bodies.

Climate Mitigation Projects are not bottomless pits where dole, good intentions and relentless effort are continually poured into with the hope of social transformation.

2.6. Practical Gender Needs

When practical gender needs of very poor rural women are solved, this has a terrific impact on their everyday lives. No more do they have to go for 1-2 days every fortnight to scrounge for firewood from fast depleting woodlands; they do not have to suffer the humiliation and torments of forest guards and other riffraff during these lonely trips. They don't have to constantly suffer sore eyes, a

raking cough and other respiratory diseases when they “*cook on a gas stove like a town woman*”. Their kitchens, homes and everything in it stays clean, free of soot. Cooking is no more an ordeal that takes many long hours; they can warm a tumbler of milk for an infant, in the middle of the night, in a matter of minutes.

Two other spinoffs from domestic Biogas that go a long way to bring women to centre stage in family cultivation and alter their strategic position are:

- Families are motivated to keep a pair of cattle for cultivation, or a cow and calf that provides additional income through the sale of milk.
- Slurry that comes out of the Biogas digester, after 90% of Methane is captured in the dome, is a valuable fertilizer.

3. ADATS

ADATS is a 40-year-old rural development NGO that has worked with 54,307 small and poor peasant families in 1,252 villages of Chickballapur district, Karnataka. ADATS has successfully demonstrated sustainable pro poor Climate Projects that provide additional income and social benefits to communities, especially rural woman. The Fair Climate Network proliferates these projects in the country through grassroots NGOs.

3.1. Climate projects at ADATS

ADATS has been active in Climate Change for the past 23 years. Immediately after the Kyoto Protocol was ratified, ADATS registered the world's first pro-poor CDM Project with the UNFCCC in December 2005. Subsequently, 3 more were registered with the UNFCCC and Gold Standard.

- A 5,500 domestic Biogas units CDM was registered in December 2005. We developed the Emission Reduction Purchase Agreement (ERPA) as an instrument to forward sell 136,871 CERs to Velcan Energy, France, for an upfront payment of € 1.1 million. After 12 years, 3,072 units (56%) are still working. Another 1,116 (20%) are under repair, and 1,437 (26%) face problems that cannot be solved. As of today, total usage stands at 19.87 million days and, as per our digitized monitoring system, a total of 194,498 tCO_{2-e} has been reduced. ERPA obligations have been fulfilled and we are looking for potential Carbon Buyers to sell 62,544 issued CERs and distribute carbon revenue to End User women as a reward for the environmental service they have provided. Rural women will, for the first time in history, be compensated for doing their housework in a climate friendly manner. ADATS will not hold back a single Rupee of Carbon Revenue.
- Another 18,000 Biogas units CDM got registered in August 2009, and an ERPA signed with a Dutch Carbon Investor to receive € 2.98 million, in advance, through the forward sale of 233,827 CERs that will be generated in the first 9 years. In the past 8 years, 11,633 units have been built. After 8 years, 6,098 units (52%) are still working. Another 3,532 (30%) are under repair, and 2,513 (22%) face problems that cannot be solved. As of today, total usage stands at 21.6 million days and, as per our digitized monitoring system, a total of 167,204 tCO_{2-e} has been reduced.
- A Forestry CDM to plant farmer friendly trees on 8,933 hectares of dry lands belonging to 8,107 small and poor peasants was registered with the UNFCCC in 2011 and transitioned to Gold Standard in 2015.

509 farmers who switched from timely rain dependent field crops to tree crops on 692 hectares were issued 26,350 GS VERs. We are currently selling small chunks of the issued Offsets in the voluntary market and distributing carbon revenue to these farmers in proportion to the number of trees that have survived – i.e. the volume of Greenhouse Gases they have sequestered on their fields.

- A Woodstoves CDM Project was registered in December 2012 and 2,744 women who do not have cattle or space to build Biogas units have been given 2 fuel efficient woodstoves each.

Responding to a chorus of demands to share experiential learning with other grassroots NGOs, and proliferate our Climate mitigation/adaptation model across India and neighbouring countries, the Fair Climate Network was formed 11 years back.

3.2. Strategic Gender Needs at ADATS

Over the past 13 years, ADATS has demonstrated that apart from solving practical gender needs, Climate Projects alter the strategic position of women within their own households. They place them in a central position within their families by actually giving cash compensation as reward for reproductive chores like cooking, cleaning, childcare, *et al.* Monetary recognition of woman's labour has a deep psychological impact on self-esteem and self-worth.

Carbon Revenues through the sale of post-ERPA CERs are not given to the (male) head of household, but to the actual End User woman for environmental services she provides. End User women meet in weekly Mahila Meetings to discuss the status of their Project. These *in-camera* gatherings give a certain status to the women and, quite naturally, they do not discuss just Biogas and Woodstoves.

4. A LOSS OF POTENTIAL

While practical gender needs are by and large, *ipso facto* and automatically met by pro-poor community based Climate Projects initiated with FCN support, the same cannot be said about strategic gender needs. Climate projects undertaken by grassroots NGOs under the aegis of the FCN have not developed effective intervention processes to alter the strategic position of women.

The loss is not just of an opportunity to embolden and empower rural women for altruistic reasons. It has a serious and debilitating business consequence in not being able to follow up with effective post-implementation services.

In providing leadership and direction to FCN Member NGOs, ADATS has shared technical learning with a decent measure of success. This is evidenced in the cost and quality of construction, digital monitoring of usage at far-flung locations, and management models with zero bureaucracy and minimal hierarchy that increase staff participation and productivity.

But ADATS' 40 yearlong proven implementation technology and intervention strategy to build strong communities that empower rural women have not been adopted in equal measure. Implementation technology is the manner in which the NGO functions and plays the role of a critical intelligentsia. Intervention strategy comprises practices that promote ownership and self-management in primary stakeholders. Perhaps even the *raison d'être* has not been properly communicated. This results in two serious handicaps – one global, the other more immediate.

4.1. Rural Women's Contribution Stays Untapped

4.1.1. NGO Perceptions

By and large, FCN Member NGOs view Climate Projects in a sectoral manner, as a technical panacea, and fail to place it within a holistic framework. They do not see the total involvement of End User women as the linchpin around which true relevance rotates. Rural women's contribution to combatting Climate Change will stay superficial. Ownership will remain nominal and token. They will be as cogs in a well-intended strategy conceived by well-meaning outsiders. Pro-poor community based Climate Projects will be yet another technical response based on current science and mildly outdated technology.

4.1.2. Corporates & Communities

Rediscovering their products/services, redefining viability, relearning processes, and reshaping enterprises is increasingly in the agenda of enlightened business leaders in the corporate sector. They see imminent limitations in the extractive and non-participative economies of today. They know that the new economies of tomorrow need to be carved with re-imagination and re-invention. Rural women, who are already in partnership with them in joint efforts to tackle Climate Change, can contribute as thinking partners by sharing nuanced and subaltern learning.

A genuine dialogue between the shapers of tomorrow will elevate the pride and prestige of rural women to novel heights. They will make fresh contribution to the debate and bring into focus unfamiliar aspects that were hitherto not considered. Provided both parties have the same take on the exciting venture they jointly undertake. This will not happen if FCN Member NGOs implement Climate Projects as run-of-the-mill poverty alleviation activities. Nor if corporate investors see the effort as merely CSR.

4.2. Weak and Unresponsive Repair & Maintenance

From a purely business perspective, we reiterate that Climate Projects simply cannot be monitored and maintained without the active participation of End User women. Elsewhere, we have forcefully argued that all non-fossil fuel based energy solutions, *as a technology-class*, lend to decentralised deployment and local ownership/management. Operational requirements are not suited to centralised management systems that were developed in a preceding industrial revolution. This is especially true when widely spread out and relatively low-level technologies are deployed in community based projects.

FCN Member NGOs do execute Climate Projects with a fair degree of cost and time efficiency. But post-construction/implementation, the centralised approach they mimic from outdated management practices result in relatively weak and unresponsive repair and maintenance systems. Minor/major issues are not immediately identified, recorded and attended to. Usage and functionality drops, CER generation falters, and the ERPA period gets extended.

4.3. Strategic Response – Embolden & Empower

For these two reasons, global as well as business, a planned and concerted intervention is needed to engender Climate Projects. End User women need to be empowered. A genuine sense of ownership has to be imbibed. They have to be equipped with social skills and business mind-set to take control of their Climate Projects.

Hands on learning of practical and digital skills is the least challenging. The real challenge, as we will now elaborate, is that none of this will happen unless and until rural women are personally emboldened and empowered within their respective families.

4.4. Modus Operandi

These past 40 years, we have had the privilege to be invited into the thoughts and feelings of tens of thousands of small and poor peasant families who allowed us entry into the private recess of their minds. We have, with our mind's eyes, seen the Mahila Meetings emerge in the Coolie Sangha. It happened through what we call a "coming out".

ADATS witnessed a "taking control" when rural women united to take charge of their lives. Biology bestowed upon them reproductive health issues they needed to address. Empowered mothers took charge of their children's schooling. It was a matter of time before they controlled household finances. Owning and managing their Climate Projects was just a natural sequence.

Soon after entering Bagepalli, we discovered homes and families where single women, widows and deserted didn't have to contend with menfolk in their houses. They were truly liberated. They faced unspeakable hardships and problems aplenty, but enjoyed something far more important, Freedom.

Most Village Health Workers, elected women Representatives, and Balakendra Teachers were from these homes. They took leadership in the Mahila Meetings. They set goals for all Coolie Sangha women to together reach. The path they traversed was not straight and linear. We were not always in agreement; our relationship was not always cordial. But they were clearly in the driver's seat where emboldening and empowering rural women was concerned.

Results have neither been spectacular nor linear in the ADATS *modus operandi*. We have had temporary setbacks and serious reversals. But when we soar above the bird's eye view, the arrow still points forward. In the following pages, we will share learning we obtained when working with rural women for the past 40 years. We will argue for parallel efforts that will, along with faultless technology implementation, enrich Climate Projects and at the same time unleash a huge but sublime potential that remains untapped.

5. THE PARTH TO EMPOWERMENT

A hapless lot, crushed through millennia of systematised social oppression, cannot be expected to magically take control of a global effort. They must first feel emboldened, empowered and enabled to take control of their own lives within their own households, which are the traditional bastions of patriarchy.

5.1. Patriarchy

We do not find every single man forcing or beating women to behave as second-class citizens. Rural women themselves act as if they are lesser to men. They voluntarily accept a lesser position with no decision-making power. How and why does this happen? Why do they voluntarily accept subservience? The answer is Patriarchy. A social system by which women are pushed down and kept under. Patriarchy objectivises women into the private property of men.

Each culture has its own distinctive norms as to how its members must live, behave and relate to one another. But the one norm that runs through all cultures, for the past 10,000 years, is patriarchy; social mechanisms that convert "male" and "female" first into "boy" and "girl" and then into "man" and "woman". Every culture has unconvincing arguments to justify rules and norms that keep women *under* men; fallacious arguments that propound muscle power, aggression, and patriarchal genes!

5.2. Cognitive Dissonance

Rural women are deeply unhappy and dissatisfied even when they go about pretending that everything is normal. They have dreams, wishes and ambitions that cannot be fulfilled because they

are not allowed to even hold such feelings. Even as they voluntarily comply, there is a deep sense of dissatisfaction. This contradiction causes a mental disturbance called cognitive dissonance. It is a mental condition that happens when people go against the accepted norms of what a culture calls “normal behaviour”. Local vernacular has many a graphic expression to describe it as madness.

Women suffer varying degrees of cognitive dissonance continually, all the time. In order to keep their sanity, they try not to think of their condition. But, in spite of themselves, they start thinking and questioning. They just cannot understand why they should be second class; why they should not wear the clothes they like, go where they want, meet with who they want, and do as they wish.

Cognitive dissonance occurs when a person's thinking turns reflective and critical; when they wonder what they have trapped themselves into through voluntary compliance. The cultural historian tries to comprehend the inner world that rural women live in by looking for points of cognitive dissonance. Those times, instances, situations and areas of tensions, conflicts and irresolvable dilemmas that arise in the lives of particular women when Individuality stares in the face of Patriarchy. When a rural woman holds contradictory beliefs, is riven by incompatible values, and hard choices have to be made.

One need not look hard. It is not a rare mental disorder. Tragically, it is a “normal state of affairs” for someone trapped in belittling circumstances a whole life long. Cognitive dissonance occurs very many times, with increasing frequency, in the most contrite, subservient and compliant woman. It is initially revealed only in the secure milieu of intimate *in-camera* gatherings where the presence of outsiders is rare, and betrayal is implausible.

5.3. Homes & Families

Patriarchy is a bottom-up ideology. It entraps through willing and voluntary compliance. The home and family are the bastion of patriarchy due to the play of an inverse locus of control reserved for the two sexes. Largely through gendered roles assigned to women and men, and in part due to biological functions of childbirth and childcare, there is a fundamental difference in the terrestrial arenas of power and status occupied by men and women. Men are strongest in their homes, weaker in village communities, and weakest in society at large. The converse is true for rural women. They enjoy the greatest pseudo respect and recognition in society at large (where it really doesn't count), are weaker in village communities, and enjoy absolutely no status at all other than that of chattel slaves in their respective homes.

The irony is that, at the same time, home and family is the one place where the rural woman wants her security, self-respect and self-worth the most. Patriarchy preys on this paradox.

5.3.1. *Happy Homes*

There are a surprisingly large number of harmonious homes in the villages, largely due to temperamental factors. Not all husbands are pigs, and not all fathers view daughters as burdens. This is not due to any reasoned consideration or conscious choice. It's simply because they are decent Humans. These are happy families where equality and tranquillity are an unargued norm.

Women live without the inhibitions that indoctrinated their mothers and grandmothers to view male and female behaviour, decision making, and occupations as gender ascribed, sanctified, and never to be transgressed. Wives and daughters in these happy homes consider themselves simply as female. Women in these homes are not given gender categories of “girls” and “women”. While mindful of biological requirements, they do not view their sex as an impediment to life choices. Questions as to what they should dream, what they can do, what they can wear, where they can go, and whom they can meet, are non-issues.

Through basic Human decency, such homes escape patriarchy in its harshest hideout, within the confines of individual families.

5.3.2. *The Vast Majority*

Then there are families where wives and daughters are confined to strictly enforced roles, and treated with suspicion. They are constantly controlled. Their freedom has been robbed for so long that they themselves believe that they do not have a right to be free. Such families are not necessarily marked by increased domestic violence, because patriarchy does the job more effectively. But they are marred with poor female health and nutrition, lower age at marriage, lack of female literacy, and other girl child/woman belittling indicators.

In spite of resigning to their fate, these contrite, subservient and compliant women too suffer from cognitive dissonance.

5.4. “Coming-out”

We can glimpse into their thoughts and feelings by observing how uninhibited young women from families where they enjoyed unsegregated freedom, deal with the outside world. When they “come out” to go to high school, college, make career choices, get jobs, choose a partner, start a new family. How do they deal with village, caste and community that still attempts to enforce a gendered identity upon them? When subtle turns to nasty and attempts to influence turn to coercion? When fundamentalists turn perverse?

Young women who “come out” from their happy families face caste/community norms, village norms, and norms of wider society that tell them they are not female Humans. They are Women. They should think like Women. They should act like Women. They should not cross a line. It is for their own safety and security. When they hear this over and over again, cognitive dissonance hits them hard.

They get together in small groups and gatherings. They talk to one another and share their sadness and confusion – their dissonance. Discussing with fellow sufferers makes them bold. Then they get empowered. They decide to defy patriarchy. They go to high school. They go to college. They go to cities and get jobs. They make friends. They choose partners. They marry who they want.

Their mothers meet with each other, talk without fear, and discuss ways and means to support their daughters. Other women from controlled families slowly come out and join the *in-camera* meetings. Because the gatherings are safe, secure and secret, it is unlikely that they will be betrayed. After a while, they too become bold. A little later, empowered.

5.5. Unity, an Intuitive Strategy

Rural women deal with their cognitive dissonance not through psychiatric help, pliant adjustment or passive surrender, but by getting together with fellow Humans in a collaborative attempt to assert individuality. The numbers are small to start with but burgeon with a surprising velocity.

Yesteryear’s individuals, privately suffering in their own homes, become a bold and cohesive presence. The halo of coercion in their numbers is so bright that adversaries hesitate to infringe.

Unity is the intuitive strategy of rural women. Unity is the physical space they go to after “coming out” of their families; where they bond with fellow aspirants in order to *return home with dignity*.

5.6. Home & Enterprise

Home and family, as we have already suggested, is where the rural woman craves her recognition the most. This could be because she hasn’t yet imagined alternate ambits. Life choices that rural women have before them are obviously not the same as in towns, cities and the metropolis. Rural

life permits a deep understanding and appreciation of nature. But the territorial realm restricts their horizon as to modern age possibilities in modern society.

Be that as it may, as with all agricultural cultures, the family and economic realms are intertwined. Rural reality, despite all market penetration, is agrarian. This immediate realm influences their choice of enterprise and also the manner in which they conduct them. There is no artificial separation between economic pursuits and home lives. Constant annual growth is not the sole measure of success for ventures they undertake. There is an easy contentment that's absent in modern age businesses. "All is well... making enough to make ends meet", is still an often-heard response to polite enquiries.

Rural women are effective process innovators. They seamlessly thread seemingly unrelated tasks into their daily workflow. This is not due to any inherent genetic ability endowed to their sex. It is the fallout of a gender based division of labour, where practically all labour-intensive tasks are assigned to women, while the use of technology is reserved for "male" jobs. "Efficient" women get more and more tasks dumped on them; they have little time to relax and reflect. This suits patriarchy very well for, as we have said, it is thinking and questioning that disturbs the status quo.

A combination of all these factors results in a unique difference in the off-farm and non-farm pursuits that rural women take up, when compared to their male counterparts. Male businesses aim only to make money. Businesses undertaken by women try to meet practical gender needs while, at the same time, also aim to make money.

"Men buy cross-bred cows to sell milk, but there won't be a glass of milk for the child in the house. Men buy a fancy pair of bullocks, which they feed the whole year round in order to put to work for less than 30 days during agricultural operations.

"We, on the other hand buy 2 sturdy cows that can do a little bit of light ploughing, and also give half a litre of milk every day for our children and to make some chai."

Climate Change technologies like biogas and woodstoves are, in this light, female in nature. They meet practical gender needs and also allow rural women to make some money by providing environmental services. So too is a small shop or eatery, stitching readymade gowns and blouses at home, and selling a basket of vegetables.

5.7. The Romantic Trap

Let us not, at the same time, perpetually entrap rural women into minor economic pursuits with virtuous interpretations. Women are not this way or that "by nature". Everything they *can do* is "natural". Biology enables while it is culture that forbids. Once exposed to wider possibilities they will, as they surely should, develop the same cunning and ambition as men. They too are Humans, albeit female Humans. "Woman" is a just a constructed category that they are placed in, waiting to break out from.

The reciprocal relationship they attempt to maintain between economic pursuits and home lives reflects a sound and sensible choice, in their current situation, after realistically assessing their capacity within prevailing opportunities. Very rarely do rural women overreach.

We should also be careful while assigning inherent values of sustainability to rural women. Sustainability is often understood as maintaining a stagnant condition without deterioration, but also with no advancement or improvement. Rural women are as innovative and adventurous as the Joe next door. But, by and large, they are averse to unnecessary and stupid risks.

Rural women could perhaps show us the way to take a step back and then more forward, with a little less enamour for the artificial future that the present day is. The untapped and sublime analytical potential earlier mentioned is perhaps a once in a lifetime opportunity, rarely offered by history, to help us retrace our choices and make corrective deflections to where we are now heading.

6. EXTENDING STRATEGIC GENDER BENEFITS ACROSS INDIA

This is not a discussion paper to share platitudes. It is as close as a Network can get to issuing an edict. From the Carbon Investors' perspective, engendering the effort is a non-negotiable requisite driven not by any pretended affection for rural women, but to ensure returns on their investment.

Spaces for End User women's genuine participation have to be created at all grassroots NGOs where Climate Projects are being implemented. This is an urgent requirement for post-construction/ implementation monitoring, repair and maintenance services.

Replication is not about making carbon copies of an effort that worked in a particular time and place. It requires a deep reflection on, and internalising of, the sense of purpose. This should be followed up with a sensible extraction of learning that contributes to a workable action plan. As a precursor to these two steps, it calls for getting rid of deep rooted cultural biases that safeguard the status quo.

Let us now turn to some practical issues faced by FCN Member NGOs.

6.1. Capacitating FCN Member NGOs

6.1.1. NGO Leaders & Management

The "project approach" will not work.

NGOs leaders need to make an absolute and irrevocable commitment to transfer genuine ownership and control of their Climate Projects to End User women, come what may. The process may have many ups and downs; the path may be tedious, time-consuming and frustrating. But it will not happen through the setting up of traditional "functional groups" that pretend to promote participation. Rural women cannot take control of their projects through the likes of SHGs, watershed committees, *et al.* for two reasons:

- i. As we have repeatedly argued in previous pages, rural women cannot be expected to magically take control of a global effort till they are emboldened, empowered and enabled to take control of their own lives within their own households. Women must be encouraged to openly discuss personal and everyday issues, and their struggles supported. This cannot happen in the project mode.
- ii. Climate change is a vast and encompassing phenomenon that influences and determines every single aspect and the very manner and nature of our existence as a species. Climate mitigation/adaptation efforts, though initiated as pre-planned and pre-packaged solutions, need to continually evolve and embrace increasing objectives. While outputs stay firmly grounded to business commitments, outcomes need to become more ambitious with experiential insight, newfound self-confidence, increased capacity, and innovation.

Patriarchy should not be viewed as a permanent and inflexible given, in spite of it having survived for close to 10,000 years and across all cultures. Modern age non-theistic cultures, based on liberal humanism, contribute to a slow chipping away of patriarchy. True, this is due to urbanisation, disappearance of the peasantry, empowerment of the common person, democratisation, and the

youth culture – traits that are not necessarily strong or even present in villages we work in. Nevertheless, as an advanced section of society, development workers need to make use of multiple attributions that exist in today's connected world.

Centralised, control-based and thoroughly outmoded systems that provide NGO leaders with a Pretender status and do little else by way of management have to immediately be rid of. Leadership in this day and age can be obtained only by recognising and nurturing the contributory potential of every single stakeholder – project staff, End Users, everyone. Every single rule and procedure that acts as an impediment to participation and productivity has to be thrown out.

6.1.2. Field Staff

With the decision to undertake a Climate Project, FCN Member NGOs put together a Climate Team which assists the FCN Tech Team to develop and register the project. However, this is a long drawn out process that takes nearly two years. After that, financial projections are made, and Carbon Investors approached. Another year or two. By then enthusiasm would have waned for want of jobs and tasks to carry out. The Climate Team would have got disbanded for want of money to pay salaries.

When, finally, an ERPA is signed the NGO quickly puts together a fresh group of youngsters who can get the job done. Their role is technical, supervisory and target driven. They arrange logistics, supply material, support masons and oversee physical progress. These Case Workers are mere construction supervisors, site managers or *maistries*.

FCN does its utmost to give them a framework to place the science behind Climate Change, the current political economy after the 2nd industrial revolution, and a historic perspective of Human cultures and civilization. Immediately after their intense learning sessions, they return to hectic schedules and physical targets, and all is forgotten.

After the construction/implementation phase is completed, these Case Workers are at a loss. Their appreciation of the Purpose is sketchy. Skills to motivate End User women to use and maintain the technology weak.

Case Workers should not just be given time and space for their personal development, but forced to make the effort. They should be made to understand that the Climate Project needs a combination of Ideas and Actions, bridged by a critical analysis based on honest and accurate data. Only that will keep them personally relevant, and the project sustainable. Else they will be efficient executors whose contribution will be exhausted after the first few years. For their own sakes, and for the sake of the project, Field staff should be compelled to continually Think, Question, Imagine and Learn.

The setting up of self organising learning environment (SOLE) should be a serious and measurable Outcome of FCN Member NGOs. Their level of participation in broader discussions, and novel contribution to furthering the debate should be objectively verifiable Indicators.

A sensible solution would have been to not create a *separate* Climate Team in the first place. A holistic understanding of Climate should have been mainstreamed into the thinking of grassroots NGOs. The initial jobs should have been carried out by the NGO's tried and tested field staff as part and parcel of their normal contribution to villages they work in. Then the issues of resource crunch wouldn't have arisen in the first place.

6.2. Coverage

To be viable and to have measurable impact, Climate Projects need to be at scale. Except for a very few mega-NGOs, no FCN Member NGO has the needed coverage. In spite of claiming to work in a block/district, most NGOs have a strong core presence in 20-50 villages, indirect influence in another

50, and that's it. Sometimes this is in a couple of neat consecutive circles, sometimes a hotchpotch spread. Whereas even a relatively small 5,000 units Biogas Project needs a contiguous coverage of about 175 villages.

In their older villages, FCN Member NGOs find it relatively easy to speak of environmental services and motivate longstanding primary stakeholder women/families to become "business women". They are able to use accumulated social capital of unity, discipline and network. After exhausting their core and peripheral villages, they are forced to go to "new" villages in their block/districts where they meet with unfamiliar faces.

The Climate Project is an entry point of sorts. It is dry, sectoral and unidimensional, with none of the passion and excitement that characterised their longstanding involvement in earlier villages. One dimensional interaction in these new villages does not automatically lead to an intimacy with communities. Small and big NGOs both face identical challenges in the construction as well as post-construction/implementation phase.

The solution is to not wait for a year or two, till construction/implementation is completed in the older villages. Confidence building measures should be undertaken in new villages much earlier, and implementing the technology must begin as and when there is a semblance of social capital. Though there will initially be differences in intimacy levels, this will soon get evened out when women from different villages meet with one another and unite to take common cause.

6.3. NGO Defaults & the Resource Paradigm

Grassroots NGOs have their default positions. They need to safeguard values and principles, satisfy stakeholders and constituencies, pay staff salaries, meet running costs, and ensure that their core activities continue. Else they will no longer have a presence in their working areas. Resource planning and mobilisation are, quite naturally, top priority for NGO leaders and managers.

However, concerns for money need to slip from *numero uno* in their list of priorities to perhaps number five or six. This can happen with a radical change in mind-set from "spending on the project" to "investing in people".

Along with a strategic shift, a small dose of faith in the power of convergence also helps! To paraphrase Paulo Coelho, *"When you are finally sure as to what you want to do, the whole universe will conspire to make you succeed!"*

6.3.1. Charity Funding

Climate Projects have plenty of money, but not for a mindless continuation of conventional activities hitherto undertaken by grassroots NGOs. In vast regions of the country, the need is also not quite as acute as it was some decades back. Service delivery in health, schooling, subsidised food supply and summer time employment are increasingly being met by the State. *Efforts to access these basic rights and entitlements have to continue with an increased intensity.* Supplementary and complementary activities will be needed to enhance what the State provides. But rights based community mobilisation and supplementary activities do not require large resources; they need dedication, determination and creative imagination.

External funding from conventional donors – church, state and national – allowed the building of vital institutional wherewithal in grassroots NGOs. Not just buildings, vehicles, campuses and training facilities. But also, the time and space to develop core values, principles, priorities and positions. Most importantly, it developed a Human infrastructure of skilled, dedicated, dependable and professional development workers from the grassroots up.

A cynical look at the past, using a simplistic “spent on the people” versus “spent on themselves” matrix will provide tabloid sensationalism. A more historic examination will reveal that without this wherewithal, grassroots NGOs would never have gained a presence and staying power to weather the ebb and flow of many a good and bad times; strengths that enabled them to create strong outcomes and lasting impact for the people they work with.

Many NGO leaders recognised value in the continuation of this NGO wherewithal in order to support the rural poor deal with the constant flux in their lives. They created self-finance mechanisms for institutional continuity. Some others took a build-and-forget, hit-and-run approach and did not.

6.3.2. *Climate Finance*

There are fundamental differences between charity funding that grassroots NGOs hitherto received from conventional donors, and climate finance. With the signing of an ERPA, manifold changes occur in the revenue situation of Member NGOs:

- Exponential increase in annual income
- Multiyear commitments needed by both, carbon investors as well as project proponents
- Replacement of charitable “spending” with a business like “investment” where every expenditure is examined under the harsh light of tangible returns

Resources are aplenty for NGOs to expand operations, implement the climate technology and maintain it for 7-8 years. But these are strict and exclusive business investments where End User women generate and sell Carbon Offsets as an environmental service business. *Actual-cost-of-generation* does not include NGO administration outside the direct purview of the business, nor their core activities like community organisation, children’s schooling, community health, credit, agriculture, etc.

Climate revenues mobilised through the sale of *yet-to-be-generated* CERs are not meant to keep NGO establishments afloat. Nor to continue with activities that have lost relevance. The presumption is that Climate Projects will be taken up by financially stable grassroots NGOs as one more layer on top of their pertinent functioning.

6.3.3. *Managing Resources*

Managing climate resources needs a transition from conventional NGO style of management to business transaction. This needs a total paradigm shift. Those who forecast, approve, disburse and record expenditures have to completely alter their approach. Radical changes need to be made through worker empowerment, abolishing layered management, and removing check and control mechanisms that have proved not only to be ineffective, but also a dampener on creative productivity. Unlike in obsolete centralised management systems, this will promote openness, transparency and self-imposed honesty.

FCN Member NGOs may not have sufficient resources to maintain the exact same organisational aplomb in the exact same manner. Partly because external funds from conventional donors reduce; partly because those funds, even when they continue, cannot match the scale that operations expand to with the taking up of Climate Projects.

But a proper realignment of operations with a business perspective, without the artificiality of propped up lifestyles, will reveal how to deal with the new resource paradigm. No drastic reduction in vital human resources is needed; no throwing out of valuable staff is called for. Just a radical alteration of organisational structure and style of functioning.

6.3.4. Empowering Rural Women – a Business Investment

Throughout this document we have repetitively argued for emboldening and empowering rural women as the vital prerequisite for efficient monitoring, repair and maintenance systems. If effective post-construction/implementation systems are in place, Carbon Offsets will be generated and translate into Carbon Revenue. ERPA commitments will be met. Post-ERPA revenue will go to compensate End User women and also maintain the systems/revenue flow.

Thought through and diverse investments made to empower rural women in varied village situations are valid business investments. So too are investments made for the personal development of field staff. They are vital, necessary, and should be included in financial forecasts. The operative words, however, are *diverse* and *varied*. A mechanical spending of a sanctioned budget will achieve nothing. Instead, it should be a disposition fund to be differently invested in different village/staff situations in an open, transparent, creative and proactive manner.

The first step then is to get out of the project mode. Planned and systemic activities do have a critical role to play. But they alone are not enough. We need to support all and every effort made by rural women to take control of their lives. We have to simultaneously work with them to incite and provoke other women to assert within their families. Struggles for dignity, self-respect, recognition and entitlement are not financially expensive. Empowerment does not happen with mere budget realisation. The challenge is not to find resources. The price to be paid is elsewhere; measured in an entirely different metage.

Any project that rural women take up to solve practical gender needs should be an expression of their self-confidence and self-reliance. Not the other way around. Only when rural women are personally and individually emboldened will they be able to take genuine ownership and control of their Climate Project. It cannot and will not happen through mere project interventions.

6.4. Mahila Meetings

We have said that Unity is the physical space that rural women go to after “coming out” of their families. We explained how they bond with fellow aspirants in order to *return home with dignity*. This space is the weekly/fortnightly Mahila Meeting where one woman from each household meets *in-camera* to discuss whatever they wish.

After a while, a range of issues effecting their everyday lives will be discussed. Field staff need to support and facilitate in a non-intrusive manner. Their job is not only to introduce disciplines like regularity, quorum and the recording of minutes. Free range discussions will be very different from structured target group meetings that perform set tasks prescribed by project planners.

This will happen only if the NGO and staff have internalised concepts elaborated in this document. Ideally, Mahila Meetings should start *before* project implementation is taken up. Early discussions should be on Climate Change, mitigation/adaptation possibilities, environmental services, *et al*. Project finances should be shared with exception-free transparency. They should be involved in setting criteria, selecting End Users, sourcing material, fixing prices, negotiating with masons, the works. Ownership will not come about with the formality of conducting a few structured “stakeholder meetings”.

Again, from a purely technical point of view, Mahila Meetings cannot be confined to mere monitoring and maintenance of Biogas units or fuel-efficient Woodstoves. Besides being dull and dreary, we have to understand that it is not only technical snags that cause dysfunction. All problems cannot be fixed with just tools and spare parts alone. A plethora of reasons, stemming from disempowerment of women, contribute to non-functionality. Often times it needs neighbours to

help a woman tide over bad times; all the women together to “speak” to a husband; arrange easy credit to buy a cow and calf; everyone contribute a pitchfork each to replace a burnt haystack...

6.5. Schooling Children

An overarching concern of rural women is the upbringing of children. Largely because of a genuine affection, a little due to biology kicking in, and in part due to the gender rote role of childcare assigned to them. Enrolment and retention has an evident value for young children. But in the context of this document, we should look at working with children in the light of empowering mothers. There is empirical evidence to suggest that such an approach gives stunning results. When mothers take the lead to run a low cost rights based effort, over 95% of children in the 6-16 age group stay in school for a full 10 years. Girls break the glass ceiling and sit in high school after the age of puberty, and fare just as well as boys.

The past 2 decades has seen the mushrooming of well-equipped and adequately funded/staffed government schools in most parts of the country. But left to themselves, they do not function. Parent pressure and a constant vigil by mothers is needed to make sure that teachers do not play truant, that all children are treated fairly, government resources used properly, and that prescribed syllabus are covered. Once again empirical evidence suggests that where government school teachers are a little scared of and answerable to empowered mothers, students fare well.

Mahila Meetings must ensure that mothers contest and enter bodies like the School Betterment Committees, check the Midday Meal scheme and *Anganwadi* crèche activities, maintain a register on school teacher attendance, and represent to the authorities when they find something amiss.

By and large, rural schools are weak in extracurricular. Cognitive development suffers. Mahila Meetings should identify young women who can conduct Balakendra activities every evening for children to play, draw, paint and be creative. They should also manage a small disposition fund to support individual children with particular assistance to stay in school.

6.6. Community Health

6.6.1. Pre-primary Health Care

Government health delivery infrastructure, with all its shortfalls, exists down to the block level. Besides gaps in the supply of drugs, equipment and personnel, a chronic ailment of the system is over flooding. The majority of patients who flock into Primary Health Centres either suffer minor ailments that do not need professional assistance, or long neglected minor ailments that have become more complicated and sometimes beyond the scope of the PHCs. Recognising this, the Government has set up lower level systems, notably Asha Workers who attend to health needs of mothers and children. What is missing, though, is pre-primary health care.

By and large, rural women are not health literate. While more informed mothers will attend to a fever or a bruise in time, preventing it from escalating, most rural women have neither the means nor the knowledge to prevent a silly cut from becoming septic, or a fever from leading to dehydration.

At the same time, there still are senior women who have some knowledge of herbs and native cures, and also experience in assisting childbirth. With a little bit of training in first aid and monthly supply of basic generic medicines, along with skill upgradation in maternity care and safe deliveries, Village Health Workers selected by Mahila Meetings can bridge the need for pre-primary health care.

6.6.2. Logistics for Referral Health

Referral health is all about logistics. It is not something that can be availed just because it is there.

Apart from Primary Health Centres, the government also has affordable specialised hospitals at the district level and in bigger cities. Many private hospitals too have sections reserved for the poor. But for most rural women, the thought of travelling to the city is daunting; finding the hospital is a challenge; and once they somehow reach there, they are clueless as to how to go about.

Once Village Health Workers are shown the ropes, they quickly become adept in taking referral patients to the cities, reaching on time, finding the correct wing, jumping the queue, availing discounts and concessions, and getting their patients treated. Even though they are illiterate or semi-literate, their medical knowledge gets enhanced. Strength and courage are recognised. Patients they bring get special treatment. Pride in being useful and knowledgeable makes fast learners.

6.6.3. Reproductive Ailments

Conventional NGO health programmes assume that women in their gender rote role are selfless caregivers for the sick. This may be true, but little is done to help them tackle their own debilitating and life threatening reproductive health issues which, with Victorian politeness, hardly ever gets to be spoken. The parallel assertion, that women have a higher threshold to tolerate pain is utter rubbish.

A hugely successful attempt to identify and treat cervical cancer at its very first stage, succeeded precisely because rural women decided to shed inhibitions and openly speak about their white discharges, irregular periods and abnormal cramps. Village Health Workers were trained to recognise these symptoms and immediately take them to special health camps. Whenever cervical cancer was detected in its 1st stage, it was completely cured with the most basic of medicines for themselves and their sexual partner(s). The model failed in several other districts where the same referral hospital repeated it with the same technical facilities. For the simple reason that women there did not have the space to openly speak about their bodies.

Biology bestows upon women reproductive health issues they need to address. Mahila Meetings need to encourage them to unabashedly speak out about their own bodily needs before playing the more glorified role of caregivers.

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