

## **Living conditions and food production**

women's knowledge and resources seen as a potential in a sustainable food strategy

Land, Birgit; Pedersen, Kirsten Bransholm

*Publication date:*  
1995

*Document Version*  
Også kaldet Forlagets PDF

*Citation for published version (APA):*  
Land, B., & Pedersen, K. B. (1995). *Living conditions and food production: women's knowledge and resources seen as a potential in a sustainable food strategy*. Roskilde Universitet. Forskningsrapportserien Nr. 25

### **General rights**

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the public portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

- Users may download and print one copy of any publication from the public portal for the purpose of private study or research.
- You may not further distribute the material or use it for any profit-making activity or commercial gain.
- You may freely distribute the URL identifying the publication in the public portal.

### **Take down policy**

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact [rucforsk@ruc.dk](mailto:rucforsk@ruc.dk) providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

# LIVING CONDITIONS AND FOOD PRODUCTION -

WOMENS' KNOWLEDGE AND RESOURCES SEEN AS  
A POTENTIAL IN A SUSTAINABLE FOOD STRATEGY.

BIRGIT LAND  
KIRSTEN BRANSHOLM PEDERSEN



**RESEARCH** REPORT

NO. 25 SEP. 1995



Institut for miljø, teknologi og samfund  
Department of Environment, Technology and Social Studies

# **Living Conditions and Food Production**

**Womens' Knowledge and Resources Seen as  
a Potential in a Sustainable Food Strategy**

Peper presented at the International Conference on Women and Environment,  
1-3 December 1992.

Birgit Land, associate professor.  
Kirsten Bransholm Pedersen, associate professor.

**Research Raport no. 25.  
September 1995**

Dept. Of Environment, Technology and Social Studies  
Roskilde University, P.O:Box 260, DK-4000 Roskilde, Denmark  
Phone: (+45) 46 75 77 11, Fax (+45) 46 75 44 03, e-mail [imts@teksam.ruc.dk](mailto:imts@teksam.ruc.dk)  
Tek-Sam Forlaget

# **Living Conditions and Food Production - Womens Knowledge and Resources Seen as a Potential in a Sustainable Food Strategy.**

**Kirsten Bransholm Pedersen, Ass.Prof.,Cand.techn.soc.**

**Birgit Land, Ass.Prof.,Cand.techn.soc.**

**Roskilde University Center,**

**P.O.Box 260**

**DK - 4000 Roskilde**

**Denmark**

***Abstract.** All over the world women are responsible for the household, more specifically cooking and shopping. In the Nordic countries, the number of working women is on the rise, hence younger men are taking on some household tasks. Nevertheless women remain responsible for cooking and shopping.*

*In industrialised food production men usually have the responsibility for the planning and the production of food, despite the fact that women make up the majority of the consumers.*

*One could ask, how can women utilize their influence as consumers to promote and contribute to the development of a sustainable food production and strategy?*

*In our reseach concerning consumers` behaviour in Denmark we have analyzed whether different consumption patterns are linked to different ways of life. Furthermore, we analyze to what extent eating habits have changed, how fast these changes occur, and how much support environmental food productions have, for example by purchasing ecological products.*

*In the paper the framework for understanding consumer behaviour is discussed. The concept the "way of life" is introduced as a basis for analysing the perceptions and priorities of consumers. The perspectives for further research lie in analysing the possibilities for the third world to create an alternative industrialised food production by utilizing womens knowledge and resources.*

## **1. Introduction.**

All over the world women are responsible for the household. Despite each country`s unique cultural background and distinctive character, women are historically responsible for the household in 99% of all families. The last 20-25 years have witnessed a discussion about equality between men and women in the industrialised world. These discussions have, amongst other things, resulted in higher education for more women and more women in the labor market. Hence the division of labor in families has changed.

In Denmark 76% of the women are engaged in the labor market<sup>1</sup>, which is one of the highest employment frequencies for women in the industrialised countries. This frequency has been on the rise during the last 25 years. It implies at least three changes concerning some households: that younger men are taking on some household tasks, the authorities are taking care of the children, the sick and elderly; and the food industries are developing fast food and more processed food. Nevertheless women, also in Denmark, remain responsible for cooking and shopping and, therefore, the nutrition of the family. One can ask, if it is possible to bear this responsibility, since the influence of women has now been reduced to that of a consumer.

## **2. Consumer Perceptions and Priorities Concerning Nutrition and the Environment.**

In Denmark the majority of the households are consumer households, only a very few self-sufficient households are left. This means that consumers are dependent on buying food at the "right price", with nutritional value and without too much preparation in the kitchen. These interests are not always compatible with food companies. Their superior goal are of course making profits. But is it not possible to combine this goal with the consumer's? Not surprisingly our research seems to reveal that the consumers have other quality perceptions than those of the food companies.

Consumer preferences have increasingly attracted attention for a number of years. Food companies developing or introducing new technologies and products are concerned about consumer reaction. In addition retail chains are also increasingly concerned about consumer behaviour.

The reason for this focus on consumer preferences is rather simple. During the last fifteen to twenty years consumer preferences have been changing, probably faster than ever before in history. New criteria of food quality have become more important, nevertheless some of these criteria appear ambiguous and self-contradictory. In this respect food producers have had to face the fact that certain technologies have been rejected by the consumers. In many respects, consumer preferences appear to be a problem for the food producers, the consumer ultimately buys the product. But what does the consumer want?

Frequently food producers, retail chains and various experts in food science and technology complain about consumer behaviour. Consumers are self-contradictory and their perceptions of important and irrelevant problems are full of misconceptions.

During the 1980s the food producers increasingly have tried to respond to new consumer preferences, self-contradictory or not, realizing that there is money in it. Although consumer

---

<sup>1</sup> 8% of these women are unemployed. 84% of the men are engaged in active employment in Denmark. The figures are from 1991.

preferences develop in ways that are not often well understood or accepted by producers and food experts they must recognize this as a condition that is not readily changed. Consumer acceptance of new technologies, their demand for alternative production concepts, etc., are becoming issues for marketing research.

When consumer preferences often seem self-contradictory, it is also a question of knowledge. For the common consumer it is quite impossible to find out how the unique food stuff is produced. The informative labels say nothing about how the product is produced. When consumers hear about the cruelty to animals in industrialized pig stables for example, many react by not buying pork for a time. But what are the alternatives? Some consumers prefer to buy ecological pork despite the higher price, others prefer meat from animals, which they have not heard anything unfavourable about, while others just stop eating meat. Food industries often react to decreasing sales by intensifying marketing strategies and not by changing the production method. Consumer apprehension about the integrity of companies will necessarily increase as the consumers are able to ascertain production methods. Companies argues, that the consumers do not want to pay the higher price for the ecological pork or in general: for better food quality.

In our research about consumer preferences in Denmark we try to determine what the consumers really do, and how women manage their responsibility for nutrition in the family.

### **The situation of the consumer.<sup>2</sup>**

Consumer preferences are changing. These changes do not only comprise of changes in quality perceptions related to single food products or categories of food (e.g. meat, dairy products etc.) but also *priorities* between different types of food. Quality perceptions relate to food products as well as to the diet.

Furthermore, a number of different considerations influence the actual food choice. Consumers do actually consider quality aspects like safety, nutritive value, sensory quality, convenience and various aspects of how the product is produced. In assessing safety risks for instance they are using their senses and experience (smell, appearances, etc. of a product contain information about its biological status that most of us can interpret rather easily). Most consumers make these assessments virtually every time they eat. However, the kind of information that the average consumer can obtain in this way will, no matter how important it is, far from always be sufficient for evaluating the risks associated with industrial food production<sup>3</sup>. This is of course the reason why more or less reliable information in the media about health or safety risks associated with

---

<sup>2</sup> The following section of paper is from: Land, Birgit; Jelsøe, Erling; Lasen, Jesper: Understanding consumer perceptions with reation to food Quality. Research Report No. 24, 1992. Dept. of Environment, Technology and Social Studies, Roskilde University Centre, Denmark.

<sup>3</sup> This kind of problem was not unknown in the period of early industrialization as noted by Gofton (1986) about the situation in Britain in last century: "among the poor, adulteration is so widespread that the Cooperative Society hires a lecturer to tour in the country giving advice as to what food should really taste like" (p.139).

eating may influence consumers' food choices, sometimes rather heavily. Food choices will often have to be made on the basis of insufficient information about product quality, hygiene, nutrition, etc.

At the same time, the complexity of the choices made by the consumer is increasing. Earlier, tradition played a major role in determining the composition of the diet and for the great majority of the population the purchasing power was rather limited<sup>4</sup>. In such a situation the complexity of food choices is also limited. Tradition is still influencing food choices and so is economy but with everything considered the situation for the consumer in a modern industrialized societies is one of increasing complexity.

The range of quality aspects which are important to the consumer is growing. As mentioned, subjects like environmental conditions, the well-being of domestic animals, health and nutrition influence the quality perceptions of many consumers. They react in different ways to ethical aspects of animal husbandry, introduction of new biotechnologies in food production, etc. This development in quality perceptions also implies that it is not only the properties of the product but also the way it has been produced which is of importance. On the other hand, the more traditional quality categories are still important. The strong focus on sensory analysis in recent years is at least a good indication of the fact that consumers still want their food to taste good, look appetizing etc.. In this respect there has been, however, also a significant development. Many consumers regard food as a source of experience. While tradition is becoming a less important determinant of food consumption many consumers are seeking new experiences in eating.

Food prices remain important determinants of food choice. Living conditions in the various countries are influencing the extent to which prices are actually confining choices with respect to quality. Thus, in recent years prices have become the single most important factor influencing food choices in Denmark due to a number of factors including a fall in real wages, growing unemployment and increasing housing expenditures. Despite the fact that many consumers express environmental concern and attitude measurements indicate a willingness among consumers to buy e.g. foods of organic farming, although the actual market shares for such products are still only a few percent (see Grunert and Kristensen, 1992). Likewise, while producers in the Danish fishing industry reports about favorable prices on fish products in other European countries, notably Italy and France, and a growing demand for high quality products, they complain about the Danish market as being a discount market where high quality products are almost impossible to sell. Even though fish is seen as healthy in Denmark<sup>5</sup>.

---

<sup>4</sup> Or as Goften (1986) explains: "Amongst the working class, we see a diet based on bread, poor types of meat and a limited number of vegetables; this is largely dictated by economics, of course with considerable differences between regions, and between town and country, but it becomes the 'preferred necessity' for many members of this class. The diet of the upper class is a self-conscious display of power, excess and ostentatious wastage" (p. 139).

<sup>5</sup> This example is based on interviews with representatives of three companies from the fishing industry and two of the largest supermarket chains in Denmark.

Resources of time and knowledge also represent a problem to many consumers. In most industrial countries the time available for household activities has been significantly reduced, first of all because of the increased number of women entering the labour market (even though the frequency of women on the labour market also varies considerably between the European countries). A part from being an important reason for the increasing demand for prepared foods this also means less time for planning the purchases and the preparation of the food. Regarding knowledge about food it has perhaps not been reduced in absolute terms but relatively the problem of knowledge is increasing as a consequence of the technological development within food production<sup>6</sup>.

### **The consumers' conditions of influence.**

All in all, many consumers are self-contradictory and food choices are often compromises. Price, accessibility, and various quality considerations are influencing the decisions with different incentives and consciously formulated goals, e.g. about health or environment, that interact with habits and tradition. Consumer behaviour may express conflicts for instance between environmental and nutritional considerations, between convenience and freshness, etc.. Also, consumers in a number of cases use their influence in the market situation negatively, i.e. by rejecting certain technologies or products, even though the reasons for it do not always seem consistent.

From the viewpoint of a traditional science-based concept of rationality consumer behaviour looks like a non-rational process. From the viewpoint of everyday life it may be rational in the sense that the consumer is trying live a coherent life on the basis of a very incomplete foundation for decision-making.

In our opinion, this situation indicates that a decisive question concerning consumer behaviour is how consumers' conditions for acting can be improved. As we have tried to point out in the discussion above, the problems originate from two circumstances. First in the technological and structural development in the food sector and, second, in the conditions that are connected to the consumers' organization of their everyday life, that is, with life styles in a broad sense of the word. It is in such a broad context of changes that consumer perceptions and priorities should be understood.

Consequently, research strategies that aim to raise the understanding of consumer perceptions and priorities in industrialized societies must take their point of departure in this broad context of changing processes (but not necessarily include all aspects in every research project, of course).

---

<sup>6</sup> This is expressed by C. Freeman (1982) in the following way: "The theory of consumer choice implies perfect information about the available array of products or services. If we are thinking of a housewife looking at the prices and quality of vegetables on a dozen different stalls in a street market this model may not be too far from the truth. But it breaks down where any degree of technical sophistication or product differentiation come into the picture, as with cars, television and other consumer durables, and increasingly with a great variety of processed food and chemical products." (p. 204)

### 3. Food Problems and Womens Resources in the Third World.

In western countries the main problem regarding food security is a matter of quality. Agricultural production is highly industrialized, and only 5,5% of the labour force is employed in this sector. Therefore it is primarily as consumers women see the possibility to influence food quality and the environmental consequences of food production, for example by purchasing ecological products.

In developing countries the problems related to food production, nutrition and environment are more complicated and urgent. Problems have another character due to different patterns of development. In these countries there are both qualitative and quantitative problems to be discussed and solved. Moreover the environmental aspects connected to these problems are critical.

In the next part of this paper, we will discuss the perspectives of a sustainable food strategy in developing countries, we primarily look at the role of women as food producers. Therefore rural women and women as wives to hunters are in focus.

#### The same old story

In many ways and for many years, the western development pattern has been the "ideal" future vision in many developing countries. This is also true of food production.

By means of modern science and western technology, the developing countries should be given "aid" to become societies such as the western. However this strategy did not succeed. Some countries may have experienced some economic growth, but in most developing countries the modernization caused poverty, over - exploitation of the natural resources and decay of social networks.

Africa must be the most glaring example. A rich continent in regard to natural resources, a continent which could provide for itself, despite western exploitation during the colonial period. Large parts of this continent suffer today: the degree of self-sufficiency is dramatically decreasing, the debt burden is increasing and malnutrition and hunger are alarming accelerating problems.

One could ask, why should **women** be able to change this unsuccessful development ?

We can answer, the best way is to try.

The history of development is one long story of a process, in which women's strength and wisdom was overlooked and disdained. And for that matter so were the women !

Historically development has been planned mainly by men to whom women were "invisible". Development was viewed from a macro economic point of view, subsequently the value of women's work was seen as a social activity, and therefore in secondary terms.

In search for food and nutrition security, and for a sustainable food production, the question could be, what have the socio-economic costs been for the neglect, invisibility and marginalization of women, and how can women's knowledge and resources be used in a sustainable food strategy in the future.

#### **4. Greenland -**

##### **The meeting between strong self-conscious women and the Danish colonial system.**

In our research project concerning women's role in the process of industrialization in Greenland, we have tried to support the thesis, that the marginalization of women's knowledge and women's ways of thinking, must be seen as one of the main reasons, behind the big problems that Greenland faces today, both in an economic and human context.

The history of women in Greenland has many common traits with the history of women in other developing countries, but some distinct traits too. Common because of their colonial history and the history of western industrialization,- distinct because Greenland is a hunting society, hence not like most developing countries which are agricultural societies.

##### **Women and food production in pre-colonial Greenland**

Women played an important role in food production in regard to the household's consumption. Men and women worked together with a clearly defined division of labour. The men were hunters and produced their hunting tools, the women were responsible for the rest of the household tasks: gathering berries, catching fish, cooking, taking care of the fire, tanning skins, sewing leather clothing for the whole family, nursing and raising the children etc. In some periods there was only a small catch, therefore one of the most important tasks for the women, was to make the most of the existing resources.

Although the households were headed by men, the women were not subordinate, as an old hunter once remarked,- "men never do as their wives say, but always as they wish." Decisions of a greater importance for the household were discussed and made together. A hunter simply could not manage without an efficient wife.

##### **New genders**

With the Danish colonial domination in Greenland, a new mode of production, a new form of social organisation and a new patriarchal system were introduced.

As in many other developing countries, the church also played a part in paving the way for commercial trade. A monetary economy was introduced, hunting was replaced by fishing industry, which from the Danish point of view, could become a source to profitable income.

With trade and fishing, wage labour and shops were introduced. An urbanisation process started, self-sufficiency in the families gradually decreased, and the traditional food stuff were replaced by western. Today the food market system is totally dominated by supermarkets. With this change nutritional standards declined dramatically, and the Danish government arranged a "reeducation" in cooking for the Greenlandic women, - cooking in a Danish way of course. More radical changes took place in the families, a new division of labour between the sexes was established.

The Greenlandic **men** were actively involved in the Danish system, on the political level, in the educational system and in the economic life. The **women** also were involved in the Danish system, but **not** on the political level. They did not have the vote in the new "democratic" system, **nor** in the educational systems. The established educations were only for men. In the economic life they were actively involved, but only as unskilled workers, as dock labourers and as workers in the fishing industry. Regarding qualifications the women learned very little. Conversely, the Danish planners used very little of the knowledge the Greenlandic women had.

The recipe for development, was the modernization theories and the means to economic growth, were neither cultural experience nor human resources. That the women could have anything special to offer, did not even cross the minds of the theorists. This patriarchal train of thought is so widespread today that it does not even surprise us any more. But it was actually new in Greenland.

The Greenlandic men did not protest very much about being preferred to form the future of their country, together with the Danish men. However, male Greenlandic politicians, demanded that the women should be allowed to vote, since there were part of the society, in which the women had greater experience and thereby the best ones to make the decisions. Women got the vote in 1948, about a hundred years after men. But around this time Greenland had become a genderized society, and in the 60's the consequences of a development built on economic growth and the marginalization of social and everyday life experiences of women began to show up. Faith in a bright future, which had carried the modernization programme through, was about to crack, and the symptoms of an incoherent everyday life showed up more and more clearly: Violence and alcoholic problems grew rapidly worse, the care for children and social losers deteriorated.

The insufficient involvement of womens' experience and potential resources had consequences seen in the following examples.

\* The principle for the utilization of the resources was maximizing and no longer optimizing. Only the most profitable species recieved industrial recognition, so much so, that the fishing resources became alarmingly reduced, and many factories closed down. The hunting culture principle and the womens' knowledge on the utilization of resources, which was characterized by "nothing going to waste", was "forgotten".

## 5. From north to south

In many other developing countries one can register some of the same patterns.

Although women in Africa, Latin America and Asia are the main producers in the agricultural economy, women do not receive any particular attention in national development plans. And among planners one seldom sees them.

### Women as the invisible managers of the natural resources

Women are the natural resource managers in developing countries.

In Africa women accounts for some 60-80% of peasant farmers, and women in agriculture account for at least 90% of all agricultural workers. They cultivate the soil, they sow, they gather fuelwood and they build shelters etc.. Women interact with natural resources as a natural and necessary part of their work and everyday life as food producers and caretakers of the household. Seen from an environmental point of view, rural women also contribute to other areas that complement the food system. These include agroforestry and soil conservation. In this way women have accumulated knowledge about forest resources, their uses and management.

However, such knowledge has yet to be fully recognized. In Ghana for example one can find exceptional examples of women managing the natural resources, to sustain their families at times of crisis (Aidoo 1988).

"Thus, in the crisis of 1983-1985 women in Ghana were known to create new menus from wild food to supplement the diets of their households and families. Also, customary rules governing fuelwood collection in many societies encourage the collection of dead and drift wood and prohibited the cutting down of viable living trees. Documented cases from Sahel show how women often took preventive measures in the interest of conservation to forestall the negative consequences of modern forestry development projects."<sup>7</sup>

It is obvious that women have knowledge and importance when we talk about solving environmental problems. Generally, women do not see themselves as technical experts on environment. Women participants at the "World Women's Congress for a Healthy Planet" held by UNCED in 1991 expressed that, and they did not consider just adding women to the environmental equation along the sectoral lines proposed by UNCED. The women suggested was to reexamining our historic concept of "development" and look at what changes are necessary from a gender perspective in our development approach to environment, economics, society and culture.

---

<sup>7</sup>Aidoo, Agnes Akosua (1988): "Women and Food Security" Development 1988 2/3 p. 58.

\* The great organizational talent and the knowledge of the women on how working processes and caretaking responsibilities for children and the weak could be combined was ignored. The women were in a way forced into the factories, and the white man did not consider who should take care of their other very important responsibilities on the homefront. A factory clock was now running everyday life. The women worked very hard in cold factory halls, up to 10 to 12 hours a day, while their children were left alone. The social network in the families gradually deteriorated. The Danish men's sexual abuse of the Greenlandic women, also made her a second class person in the same men's eyes, they were seen as "cheap & ready" workers.

\* The rapid industrialization process in the 50's and 60's, demanded skilled workers - on all levels. But investments, had only been made in half of the Greenlandic population, - the men. Furthermore, only relatively few men were actually educated. All management positions, in the public and private sector, were occupied by Danish citizens. Consequently, the Greenlandics did not have any responsibility in their own country. These conditions have caused frustrations, feelings of powerlessness and anger in Greenland, and ignited the explosion, that started the cultural and the political resistance-movement in the 70s.

The women wanted to take part, and be responsible for the new development. During the 50s, after they had received the right to vote, they established a women's movement, and they tried to create new social networks. Moreover, they created new political ideas, to ensure social stability and women's participation, in their country's development. But the women were heard only for a few years in the 50s.

### **New beginnings**

In 1979, when Greenland achieved their local independence, the social and political problems were bigger than ever. But the women were not brought to their knees. They still pictured themselves as indispensable in "the big household of their land". And perhaps that is the future hope for Greenland.

The young women organized themselves in their fight against the ethnic and patriarchal oppression. They worked and fought, and gradually it was apparent, that the women were an important part of changing the Greenlandic society, if the path development was to be transformed.

\* Today there are just as many women, in the educational system, as there are men.

\* An economically ruined town, has been rebuilt and reconstructed, by three women-mayors in the front.

\* Two out of seven ministers are women, and they are highly appreciated for their trustworthiness and their social responsibilities.

\* More and more women are taking part in the discussions, where decisions are made.

There is still a long way to go, - the economic and social problems, have to be solved, and the system is still predominantly male. But the greenlandic women have proved, that their wisdom and experiences are indispensable.

### **Unused woman resources in rural development.**

We are often told that the high birth rate constitutes the worst pressure on the environment. The Brundtland report states that poverty is one of the worst enemies to the environment. The strategies in continuation of this have been the wellknown family planning programs.

Several women scientists have suggested another agenda.

They ask **why** does self-sufficiency have a downward tendency ? **Why** are all these children born ? And what have these concerns to do with **womens'** everyday life and their role in the development process ?

Milimo<sup>8</sup> argues that women's role concerning population and food problems have been misconceived. That is a big problem, but seen in a positive context, correcting earlier mistakes can be the key to the solution of food and population problems.

As we saw in Greenland, women in precolonial Africa have played an important role in food production. Usually, the households were headed by men, but women generally had their own land, where they grew crops, furthermore they had access and control of the productive resources. Although the colonial process had a unique form in each African country, there are several common traits in regard to the role of women's in rural development.

In many countries colonial regimes introduced property laws rooted in rights of private ownership of land. A hierarchy emerged! The European settlers received the best land. African men, as household heads, were assigned the less fertile land of which the best part was used for cash crop cultivation, while the rest was used for subsistence farming, which the women were responsible for. During this period the western patriarchal system was founded, and it went on after independence. (Milimo 1987)

Although the African men were given ownership of the land, it was still the women who kept the subsistence production going. And in many male-headed families, the women provided for the households, since men often were hired as migrant workers in the mines. The women could not lift this burden. The productivity of rural women deteriorated. But why ?

As mentioned above, women were given the less fertile land. Furthermore several analyses have shown that womens' farm work has been very mechanized. Investigations have also shown that men's farm work has been favoured in comparison to women's.

Labour-saving tools are first introduced to tasks done by men such as land clearing and ploughing. And in areas where women in some of the households are doing these tasks, they have to borrow equipments such as draft animals, ploughs and cultivators from the men. Subsequently, women suffer from a loss of income. Work normally done by women such as weeding, processing and storing corps, is still predominantly labour intensive (Milimo 1987).

---

<sup>8</sup>Milimo, Mabel (1987): "Women, population and Food in Africa:Zambia" Development 1987 2/3.

Women's lack of access to productive resources and labour saving technology has an essential effect on the birthrate. Women's workload requires children for farm work and other social activities in the household. Children form the labour force in agriculture and they are seen as a source of future security for their parents. That is a very important condition in understanding why women "prefer" a large family.

This little tale from real life tells us, that population problems and poverty problems cannot be solved with family planning programmes, nor simply by suggesting integration. There must be new concepts concerning development, work, social organization and human goals.

### **The voice of women must be heard**

Many researchers have proved that women have a profound knowledge of their social and natural environment. But it is not enough to state that, if women are to act adequately in regard to the responsibility they feel for food security, nutrition and human environment. Vandana Shiva says in a very simple and correct way:

"To say that woman and nature are intimately associated is not to say anything revolutionary. After all, it was precisely just such an assumption that allowed the domination of both women and nature. The new insight provided by rural women in the Third World is that women and nature are associated *not in passivity but in creativity and in the maintenance of life.*"<sup>9</sup>

A "new" development requires releasing women's creativity and initiative in improving society. This can take form on many levels:

\* On a personal level, the traditional view of men's and women's tasks legitimizes the patriarchal structure and distribution of productive resources. It is necessary to take the gender aspect into account if social sustainability is the goal.

\* Structural changes are needed. Technological development in agriculture is important, but there should be focus on reducing women's workloads and generally on enhancing the role of women in agriculture and not displacing them. In this respect it is important to learn from the many failures in development programmes. Women are only motivated to join a development strategy positively and actively if the quality of their everyday life is improved.

Women in the Appiko movement in South India expressed it in this way. Without access to resources, information, education and influence they had no interest in taking part in a new eco-development project initiated by the state.

It is on an everyday life level that the discussions must take root. And women's role in the informal sector places them in the best position to balance social, cultural, ecological and political goals, and create a model for sustainable livelihood.

---

<sup>9</sup>Shiva, Vandana: (1989) "Staying Alive" s47.

\* Finally, we must stress that there is a global aspect in solving food and nutrition problems. The western capitalistic system actively counteracts a self-reliant development in the developing countries.

With a neo-colonial mentality and a neo-liberal economic policy the exploitation of the developing countries is consolidated and extended. Trade bargaining combined with active governmental support to the western farmers to oust the products from the developing countries is widening the North-South gap. The annual **outflow** from South to North has reached a level on U.S. Dollars 60 billion pr. year<sup>10</sup>.

A little example from our own country Denmark. The government is very proud of the level of foreign aid. It amounts to 1% of GDP, one of the highest percents in the western world. Yet the drop in coffee prices in the 80's saved the Denmark one and a half times the foreign amount, -and ruined many small coffee farmers and forced many others to exhaust their soil with fertilizers and pesticides.

## 6. Concluding Remarks.

In many ways there is a world of difference between the everyday life possibilities and prospects for the women in the industrialized countries and in the developing countries.

If we see the situation of women in the West as a token of that which normally is called development, we see two trends. There are some improvements and some declines.

Women in the West have gained many of the demands, which the women in the developing countries still are fighting for. We have the access to education, we are part of the labour market and earn our own wages, we are allowed to vote and are represented in the parliament.

Some of the most eye-catching environmental problems, which make it complicated for women to take care of their families, are partly solved, such as problems concerning waste, clean water and sanitation.

But we have paid a price. Other problems have increased and new problems have turned up. We can mention:

- decreasing contact to the soil:

Women are no longer the managers of the natural resources. Only 5% of the labour force works with agriculture, and most of them are men.

- decreasing contact with food production:

In regard to our special subject, the quality of food products, we can mention that the industrialization of food production has caused many problems e.g.: Increasing use of preservatives and fertilizers, food with lower nutritional value and taste, and increasing animal cruelty by breeding in industrialized stables.

---

<sup>10</sup>Paz, Y. (1992): "Sustainable agriculture..." Development 1992:2, p 51.

- decreasing time for family and children:

In Denmark 76% of the women and 85% of the men are engaged in the labour market. The employment frequency for women is one of the highest in the world. And since day and night amounts to only 24 hours, many of the earlier household and caretaking tasks are left to others. Even though others do in fact carry out these tasks, the woman still feel responsible for the welfare of the family, including nutrition. But we do not have very much influence on the quality of the welfare.

### **Problems and possibilities**

In our paper we have discussed if it is possible to have this responsibility, since the influence of women now has been reduced to that of a consumer. Now we will outline some problems and some possibilities as we see them. We will discuss how the problems can be solved, and how the possibilities can be used:

The most alarming problems for food security and environment are, that women no longer are managers of the natural resources, and we have only little direct influence on the food production. To minimize these problems we must amongst other things, demand more directness about production methods, and a greater focus on the local food market.

But we have possibilities too. As consumers we can press for a more sustainable food production. We can buy organic products, and in this way take care of the earth, we can accumulate knowledge in regard to the nutritional value of the new highly processed food products, and demand better food quality, we can buy food products imported directly from developing countries and in this way show that we disagree with the trade bargaining policies, etc. But to use these possibilities women in the West must be more aware of their role as consumers, because we are up against great economic and political interests.

There is no doubt that most women think of other methods to solve environmental and nutritional problems compared to men. But it is not enough to say, that women must be involved in the development of sustainable societies. With this paper we have wanted to point out that it is important to define what type of development one is talking about.

## References

- Aidoo, Agnes Akosua** (1988): "Women and the Food Security: The Opportunity for Africa" *Development* 1988 2/3.
- Antrobus, Peggy** (1992): "Women and the Informal Sector: Priorities for Socially Sustainable development". *Development* 1992:3
- Arnfred, Signe** (1991): "Køn og modernisering" in "Gender, culture and power" vol 1. ed. Kristi Stølen, Oslo 1991.
- Carney, Judith A** (1992): "Peasant Women and Economic Transformation in the Gambia". *Development and change* April 1992, vol 23, nr 2.
- Chipeto, Victoria** (1991): "Population, Women and Environment". *Development* 1991:1.
- Dankelman, Irena** (1988): "Sustainable Development: The Gender Perspective. *Development* 1988:1.
- Gofton, L.** (1986): The rules of the table - sociological factors influencing food choice, in: *The food consumer*, ed. Ritson, C. et.al, John Wiley & Sons, Chichester/New York.
- Grunert, S.C., Kristensen, K.** (1992): *Den danske forbruger og økologiske fødevarer* (The Danish consumer and ecological foods), Aarhus School of Business, Aarhus.
- Haastrup, L.** (1990): *Maden på bordet! Strukturel kulturanalyse af husarbejde, mad og måltider*, (Food on the table! Structural culture analysis of house-work, food and meals, Danmarks Lærerhøjskole, København.
- Harcourt, Wendy** (1992): "Paradigm Shifts: Reflections on the World Women's Congress". *Development* 1992:1.
- Heyzer, Noeleen** (1988): "Productive Labour: Rural Women in South East Asia". *development* 1988:2.
- Huyghebaert, A.** (1991): Trends in the perception of food quality by the consumer - his expectations and needs, in: *Food policy in Europe, Nutrition, technology, analysis and safety*, ed. Deelstra, H., Ellis Horwood, New York/London.
- Jelsøe, E. and Elert, C.** (1987): Technological development within the food sector and consumers' demand for change, in: **Jelsøe, E. and Olsen, A.**: *Milk production and products: Technological development, food policy and consumer aspects*, FAST Occasional Papers No. 158, Bruxelles.
- Land, B., Jelsøe, E., Lassen, J.** (1991): *Livsformsteorier i relation til forbrugeranalyser* (Way of life theories in relation to consumer analysis), Roskilde University Centre, Roskilde (unpubl. manus.).
- Land, B., Jelsøe, E., Lassen, J.** (1992): Understanding consumer perceptions and priorities with relation to food quality. Research no. 24. First International Multidisciplinary Conference on food Choice, July 1992, Brussels.
- Lassen, J.** (1992): *Food Quality and the consumers*, MAPP Working Paper, Aarhus School of Business, Aarhus (forthcoming).
- Milimo, Mabel** (1987): "Women, Population and Food in Africa: Zambia". *Development* 1987 2/3.
- Paz Yehudah** (1992): "Sustainable Agriculture, Human Development, Ecological Enhancement - Are these Contradictions in Terms ?. *Development* 1992:3.

**Pedersen, Kirsten Bransholm** (1991): "Kvindeerfaringer som ressource i udviklingen af det grønlandske samfund. RUC, DK 1991.

**Rahama, Anna** (1988): "Women Farmers, Technological Innovation and Access to Development Projects" *Development* 1988:4

**Rasmussen, Laila Sønder** (1987): "Kvinder og økologi" i "Hushold i forandring" KBH, DK 1987.

**Shiva, Vandana** (1989): "Staying Alive" London 1989.

**Steenkamp, J.-B., van Trijp, H.** (1990): Quality guidance: a consumer-based approach for product quality improvement, in: *Marketing Thought and Practice in the 1990's: Proceedings of the 18th Annual Meeting of the European Marketing Academy*, vol. II, Athens: EMAC, 1191-1217.



**TEK - SAM FORLAGET**

ISBN 87-7753-021-7



**Roskilde University P.O.Box 260 DK-4000 Roskilde Denmark**  
Phone (+45) 46 75 77 11 · Fax (+45) 46 75 44 03 · e-mail [imts@teksam.ruc.dk](mailto:imts@teksam.ruc.dk) · Telex 43158 rucbibl dk