Module 2 Unit 3

This is an **OPTIONAL READING**

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"We Are Also Human": Identity and Power in Gender Relations

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Introduction: Into the Heart of Gender Inequity

There are two principal strands of approaches to human rights today. Traditional human rights organizations remain concerned chiefly with the relationship between the individual and the state, and with the state's ability to protect, prevent abuse of, and fulfill the human rights of the individual. However, the rise of rights-based approaches in developmental organizations since the late 1990s has brought a different perspective to human rights. Developmental organizations' use of human rights addresses the perennial question of how to deal more effectively with the endemic social problems of poverty, marginalization, and discrimination, with a focus on the unequal power relations that sustain these inequalities.

The single most important feature of a rights-based approach to development is that it starts from the premise laid out in Article One of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights that we are all equally human. Article One states: "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood." Sadly, it is one of the most remarkable and persistent aspects of human cultures that among the diverse peoples in every society today there are substantial numbers who inevitably regard other groups as being less human than they are. Wherever people are regarded as less human, they will be discriminated against. And globally, the largest group of all routinely regarded as less human are women. They are thus the largest category of people who experience throughout their lives a variety of forms of discrimination.

Women's movements, and attempts to promote the empowerment of women, have been present for many decades. The debates and discourses around feminism and its interface with development interventions are diverse and intricate (see Cornwall, Harrison and Whitehead 2004). One

of the challenges of all continuing efforts to focus on gender equity issues is to avoid "mainstreaming" feminism into a quiet complacency.

My argument is that adopting a rights-based approach to development can further the ability of initiatives seeking to address the more pervasive factors that perpetuate gender inequality. Before the advent of rights-based approaches, practical attempts to empower women often missed an essential starting point and basic matter of social justice: until men accept women as equally human, attempts to promote the empowerment of women will necessarily always be limited in the scope and longevity of what they achieve. Gender and development approaches have stressed the importance of, incorporating relational approaches to women's empowerment that require the involvement of men as well as women, but one of the consequences of the mainstreaming of gender equity initiatives has been the depoliticization of gender and development goals in this regard (Goetz 2004).

In moving forward with approaches that aim to further women's empowerment, we must return to questions of how to change the relevant social relations, and thus many of the basic systems, values, and patterns that structurate human societies today. At the heart of these relations lies the way in which men perceive themselves and cast their own individual and collective identities. Until men are able to construct their notions of self differently, and change the ways they feel capable of achieving status and respect for themselves and their families, women's status as subhumans and second-class citizens will persist. Women's roles must also be addressed, since as mothers, mothers-in-law, sisters, aunts, and neighbors, they too play a major part in perpetuating the stigmatization and discrimination that affect other women. A change in women's attitudes occurs when they realize that men's portrayal of themselves as superior is not supported by religious doctrines, or most constitutional law, or the international human rights frameworks behind the constitutional codes.

In this chapter it is therefore argued that a rights-based approach is essential to the improvement of the situations of women and their families. Such improvement requires a relational approach to rights that sees us all as moral beings possessing rights and responsibilities equally. For women, especially those who experience daily conditions of poverty and vulnerability, acting to improve their own lives and those of their children requires their ability to advance their status as citizens who regard themselves, and are regarded by others, as having rights equal to those of men and other higher-status social groups. This requires a significant sharpening of our focus on dealing with the culturally embedded factors that sustain the status of women as less than fully human.

This argument will be supported through the use of material drawn largely from analytical and programmatic work undertaken on issues of

gender equity within CARE International. For this discussion specific projects are a backdrop, and the commentary engages with some of the learning taking place in the organization as it struggles to come to grips with what an organizational strategic objective to address issues of gender inequity means. In 2004, CARE produced a "unifying framework" that aims to demonstrate the interrelationship of different programmatic approaches the organization has used in its development of a "good programming framework" (McCaston 2004). The unifying framework relates approaches that CARE has used since the mid-1990s—a livelihoods approach, a focus on partnership and civil society, a growing emphasis on gender equity, and now a rights-based approach, which has also led to an expanding focus on themes such as inclusive voice and governance. In essence, the unifying framework states that all CARE's work should be seen as contributing to three outcome areas—changes in human conditions, in social position, and in the enabling environment. Additionally, in contributing to these outcome areas, all programs should be addressing a selected core set of underlying causes of poverty, which the organization believes are critical and feasible targets for its efforts. As one of these underlying causes of poverty, gender inequality is a focus for all of CARE's work.

The Notion of Equity—And Why It Matters

In pondering different ways of starting this chapter, I decided that the best way to do so was by relating the three incidents that most persuaded me of the value in approaching women's empowerment by specifically talking about human rights and the central notion that we are all equally human.

The first of these incidents occurred during a review of the gender component of what was, for its time, an innovative livelihoods improvement project in southwest Zambia—the Livingstone Food Security Project (Turner 2000). Critical to the project's impact was its institutional development strategy based on a simple formula of self-formed village management committees (VMCs) and their constituent cell groups, which spread rapidly through their sharing of drought-tolerant seed varieties. The gender component of the project was initiated as a response to a gender analysis that revealed conflicts between the men and women participating. These had emerged in particular in a meeting at which men accused their wives of "stealing crops" and issues of control over surplus produce and household income became apparent (Sitambuli 1998).

The social roots of men's control over crop surplus decision making lay in the fact that in this matrilineal but patrilocal context, men's families pay dowry, so the man controls income, while children "belong" to the

wife who is then responsible for their health, food, clothing, education, and so on. With attention to gender being something new in the project as well as the community, the gender officer decided it was best to tackle practical needs before explicitly confronting gender issues: "Talking about gender in a community was seen as dangerous and provocative."[2] However, the gender officer did work on staff attitudes—for example, some of the Tonga male staff had cancelled meetings if "no one turned up," which meant that no men had showed up, despite women being present. The staff, following the recruitment of additional women, decided that to change attitudes in the community it was better to look at the issues from a male perspective, and persuade men that they would benefit from greater equality. For example, better trained and nourished women would be able to work more efficiently and earn more income, which would benefit the whole family.[3]

The gender program activities focused on raising women's incomes, largely through providing them with financial and business literacy training, then working with the village institutions to create the space for women to engage in income-generating activities more successfully. One area in which women raised their incomes substantially was beer brewing, where they had traditionally "lost" much of their income by giving away free beer for various reasons. By controlling these handouts women were able to increase their profits several times over, and this extra income gave them the ability to meet a range of household needs.

However, this approach to gender was limited: there was no discussion of human rights or dignity, or of the premise that men and women are equally human. The problems with this deficit were borne out in evaluation interviews with some of the main program participants. One woman, the chairperson of an area management committee, was asked about her relationship with her undoubtedly supportive husband, and remarked: "This is just a position, so when I go home I need to remember that I am just a wife. I am married, and so I have to respect my husband, so I am very glad that he has allowed me to accept this position." When asked in a separate interview about the couple's relative equality, her husband responded: "I look at my wife as an equal, because she is able to do what she wants to do, and I can do what I want to do. Other men stop their wives from participating in all these development activities. I can even allow her to go and attend a course (in Livingstone) for a week."[4]

The similarity of a headman and his wife's comments on the subject of feeling equal show how the project had left the underlying factor of women's unequal identity untouched. As the headman's wife noted: "My husband commands a lot of respect, so I have to respect that too and support him. No, we are not equal as people, as he is a headman, and is accorded a lot of respect, and I am just a wife and a woman."[5] The

limitations of the Livingstone project in promoting women's empowerment are typical of livelihoods programs of its generation, which perhaps pursued a limited women's group solidarity approach and contributed innovative work on improving gender relations, but did not incorporate a notion of gender equity.

The second incident occurred during a visit to a daytime drop-in centre for sex workers in Bangladesh in January 2002. The centre had been established by a self-help association of sex workers, Durjoy Nari Shanga—the "difficult to conquer women" association. When women were asked how their association had helped them, the first to reply stated, "we realized we are also human beings." Recognizing their innate equality with others had not reduced the risks the women faced, but it had equipped them to deal with these risks more effectively. One example they provided was that they were less afraid to tell the police to stop harassing them, and confident enough to say, "like you, we have an equal right to have an income" (Drinkwater and Bull-Kamanga 2002). Theirs has been a struggle against various forms of male power, and discrimination and stigmatization by both men and women as "bad," "fallen," and "unclean" (Magar 2005).

In its early days CARE's SHAKTI project[6] worked with these women in enormously creative ways, with staff themselves going through a profound change process too. The project was piloted in the Tangail brothel, a community of some 800 sex workers and their children. Interactive discussions with the sex workers late into the night enabled the social analysis and self-analysis staff required to understand the role their own attitudes played in perpetuating the discrimination and stigma against the sex workers (Magar 2005). In one exercise, the sex workers were asked what their priorities were; at the top of their list was the ability to wear shoes outdoors.[7] In the complex network of social relations of the Tangail neighborhood, the *samaj*—modeled after traditional village councils, and consisting of landlords and originally two *sardanis* or madams—wielded tremendous power and control over the sex workers (Magar 2005). *Mastans*—male gangs allied to local politicians and landlords—act as enforcers, regulating local economies and exploiting vulnerable groups through the use and threat of violence. Forbidding the sex workers the right to wear shoes was a way of publicly marking their status as lesser beings and restricting them to the locality.

It was not just the opening statement that marked the day of the visit for me, nor the simple but powerful utterances these women then made while talking about the things they were striving for—education for their illegitimate children, savings for future pensions, and less illegal harassment from the police and the government agencies supposedly responsible for their welfare. It was also the juxtaposition of the courage the

women's actions required with the visual evidence in the day refuge of their vulnerability, as well as the understated eloquence with which a woman field coordinator from CARE revealed much of this to me—a hand gesture, or a quiet comment—and the space she created for all the women present to speak from their hearts.

It is extraordinary what these women have achieved—with some guidance, but largely of their own initiative. Their first activity in Tangail, with SHAKTI's support, was to establish a clinic. They contributed money to the clinic's establishment and were part of the management team that ran it (Magar 2005). Years and many achievements later, Durjoy Nari Shanga continues to strive to prevent the exploitation of women, both by fighting the abuse they constantly receive and by preventing them from being forced into sex work against their will.

The third incident occurred during a visit to a *mahila mandal* (women's group) in the Durg district of Chhattisgarh state in India in July 2004. This meeting took place during a reflective practice exercise with a huge CARE India health and nutrition program that worked with some nine million people in ten states. The program sought to expand its emphasis on gender equity issues concerning health and nutrition practices, but as the women noted: "Even in key messages changes are not happening. It is not possible for women to rest during pregnancy, or to improve their diet. Men still think that they are men—they still feel that they cannot get involved with household work."

When asked what changes they would like to see, one of the leaders of the group—a representative on the village's local *panchayat* structure—made her feelings clear:

> We would like to see nothing less than total gender equity . . . we want to be seen as equals, and to know what our rights are. The state should be more responsible for teaching us these rights. Why do we have 33% reservation in the PRI? It should be 50% (since otherwise, men will still make the decisions). Also, whilst we have 33% reservation for women here, this is not the case at [the] national level. We still have very few women there. We need more women who can represent women's interests. We would like to demand equal wages for men and women. . . . We don't have enough information on things, there should be a women's centre in the village, where we can get help if needed.
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> Some men are really behind times. We would like to challenge traditional roles more. We work both inside and outside the home, yet society still says that men are superior to women. Why does this happen? It really needs to change. It is hard to

think of a program to change men. Men are intelligent enough to know that they should change, but their hearts do not allow them. Men have to make personal decisions to change (Drinkwater, Singh and Hora 2004).

As our discussion continued, case after case emerged of women who had been beaten and harassed by their husbands. So why does this happen? Why do men—and some women—continue to stifle women, to see them as less equally human and hold back their ability to contribute more effectively to their own lives and the lives of those around them? And what does this perpetuation of gender inequality do for men? The women had some answers to their own questions, but more on that later, as these questions are explored in the following discussion.

Women As Less Human

Women are regarded as less than men in diverse ways in different cultures. In many African contexts, the ways in which women are regarded as less than fully human are varied, but most share the common factor of depriving women of their identity as people. First, they do not have names. In cattle owning communities in Zambia, as declaimed by one polygamous Lenje man, "women are like livestock."[8] They can be bought and sold, as cattle can, and they are a productive asset, as cattle are. In a recent interview in a matrilineal Lamba area, an elderly woman asked the name of her daughter-in-law and neighbor of more than 11 years could not supply it. To her she was only *vana* so and so, the mother of her first born son.[9] As commented in a report on a project working with adolescent girls in India, they are often seen only as "temporary people," who will cease to be (at least for the father) once they have disappeared inside a marriage (Mehrotra 2003).

This practice of seeing women only in terms of the men they are tied to has been taken to extremes in Lesotho and Swaziland. In Lesotho, there is an old saying that "[a] woman is the child of her father, her husband and her son" (Goering 2004). It is only recently that the constitutions of both countries have stopped treating women as minors incapable of making decisions of their own. Lesotho women moving to the lowlands in search of jobs in the textile industry have established new forms of household that often lack a "permanent" male and thus previously did not legally exist, further heightening the women's vulnerability (Wason 2004).

This loss of identity, and the resultant devaluation of women's own sense of self, can be traced back to the socialization practices in such cultures—in particular their perpetuation of the social identities of men as sexually dominant and women as sexually subservient. In a study

looking at gendered power relations in the Central Region of Malawi, the widespread practice of *Gulu Wamkulu* initiation rites to prepare boys and girls for marriage was reported for the two main ethnic groups in the area, the Chewa and Yao. These ceremonies, it was argued, promote "many of the behaviours and mindsets in households and communities that lead to unequal gender power relations," and also encourage degrading and risky sexual activities and a high prevalence of sex outside marriage. Women "felt their male children were taught bad behaviour and language through the songs of this tradition and that they lost respect for women as a result. Boys are taught that once they have been initiated they automatically become adults and as such deserve respect from their mothers and society." The *dambwe* cult dance, which involves men and boys over nine years of age, encourages violent behavior against anyone not initiated into the institution—which is why there is pressure on young boys to be initiated. Young girls and women caught by the dambwe may be harassed and raped by the dance participants. These traditional institutions are regarded as the training centers for today's youth to become tomorrow's leaders, and the general teaching of these institutions is that a woman should sexually please and listen to her husband—"he knows best" and is head of the family (Chalimba and Pinder 2002).

Whether or not initiation ceremonies are still widely practiced, in most African cultural contexts women remain sexually dominated by men, as now seen through women's ubiquitous powerlessness to protect themselves against HIV/AIDS (Win 2004). Even educated middle-class women are frequently unable to negotiate safe sex and denied a say in decisions about sexual practices. For example, men—taught to prefer dry to wet sex—encourage urban wives to use herbs that will cause dryness and more pain, while preferences for women who have "hot" rather than "cold" vaginas can lead men to prefer women who are HIV/AIDS positive, since they tend to be "hot" As my informant here remarked, addressing these issues is about dealing not just with gender and power, but also with cultural perspectives on sexuality.[10] Yet seeing women as equally human and entitled to their own pleasure, rather than as vehicles solely for reproduction and men's satisfaction, would turn upside down men's conceptions of themselves.

The notions men develop about sexuality go to the center of how they see themselves, to their core concepts of self. Changing sexual practices requires men to reconstitute their identities. This is extremely threatening. The greatest threat of all lies in the requirement that men reevaluate women's status in relation to them. If men are to see women as equally human they are required to understand their own power in the world in a completely different way. Not surprisingly, this poses enormous challenges.

Nowhere are these deeply rooted notions of sexuality and identity clearer than in cultures where notions of honor and shame are paramount. As Rozario notes regarding Bangladesh (and the cultural context within which Durjoy Nari Shanga is struggling for the rights of sex workers):

> Anyone who has any real understanding of Bangladeshi patriarchy will appreciate that making an effective challenge to patriarchal ideologies in Bangladesh is extremely difficult. The ideology that supports patriarchy in Bangladesh centres on concepts such as izzat (honour, focusing in particular on the control of women's sexuality), lajja-sharam (shame) and parda (purdah, restrictions on women's mobility). These concepts pervade the whole society and indeed support the class structure of the society (Rozario 2004).

Beginning to address gender inequality in such contexts means trying to deconstruct the intertwined effects of religion and culture, an exercise that CARE staff in another country office, Niger, developed the courage to undertake. The population in Niger is predominantly Muslim, but the nature of cultural practices is influenced heavily by traditional conservatism. In the south central Maradi Department, a gender equity and household livelihood security project wrestled with whether religion could be used to address some of these gender inequities. The project decided to work with the Union of Moslem Women in Niger (l'Union des Femmes Musulmanes du Niger) to reach the most influential *marabous* (Islamic leaders and teachers) in Maradi. A group of three *marabous* helped to identify two focal point *marabous* per village, and to produce a guiding document summarizing all the *sourates, hadiths,* and verses of the Koran that address the rights of women on issues such as marriage, divorce, inheritance (including of land and other productive assets), cloistering, and access to education and training (Sayo 2002).

Nevertheless, in areas where Islamic practice still lacks women's voices and mixes with deeply conservative cultural environments, women retain a status that is well short of fully human. In late April 2005, the second woman in two weeks was stoned to death in a remote Afghan village, simply for being in the company of a younger man to whom she was not married (IRIN 2005). Although the new Afghan constitution upholds the equal dignity of women, a 2003 Amnesty International report on the justice system in Afghanistan titled itself, "No one listens to us and no one treats us as human beings." The report notes that the widespread violence against women is a result of practices still predominant such as the forced marriage of girl children. The criminal

justice system remains too weak to offer effective protection of women's rights to life and physical security, and itself subjects them to discrimination and abuse. Protection for women at acute risk of violence is virtually absent (Amnesty International 2003).

In the focus group discussions held for the production of the Amnesty report, women perceived the difficulty in getting help as rooted in their subordinate status and lesser worth. Even in seeking help from a government body, an abused woman can be seen as "a bad girl who doesn't obey her father or brother." Women participants said, "We just want to be treated as human beings." CARE has long had a focus on girls' education in Afghanistan, and is seeking to effect ways of including women's voices in local decision-making processes, but there remain great challenges concerning how to proceed more broadly with work that addresses deep-seated cultural norms of gender inequity.

Developing Women's Solidarity, Engaging Men and Changing Culture

The final section of this chapter summarizes what some of CARE's more recent experiences have shown about the kinds of approaches needed to address these deep cultural causes of gender inequality. Where successful learning and practice has taken place, it has occurred through three contributions by which rights-based approaches have made a positive difference to the nature and efficacy of projects.

The first contribution is to the nature of analyses. Projects adopting a rights-based approach are beginning to undertake much deeper analyses of why gender inequity and its consequences are so pervasive, and are then addressing the consequences and implications of these analyses. Two brief examples will suffice here, both drawn from Bangladesh.

There is common agreement among all researchers on gender inequality in Bangladesh that the root underlying cause rests in "the overall gender ideology of Bengali patriarchy, with its systematic devaluation of women and its denial of their right to an independent existence without male guardianship" (Rozario 2004, 28). This ideology is held in common by the Hindu Bengalis who comprise 16 percent or so of the population, as well as by the very small populations of Christian and Buddhist Bengalis. It also promotes violence against women, seen by many men and women as a normal part of life, and considered a personal and private affair to be handled within the family or local context. The legal system is distrusted and widely perceived as unlikely to provide unbiased justice in violence cases. Practices related to the patriarchal gender ideology, such as dowry and child marriage, are illegal but almost universally prevalent. Many villagers willingly express unhappiness, particularly

with respect to dowry, but see no socially viable alternatives (Robinson 2005, 11).

In the Dinajpur area of northwest Bangladesh, a small pilot violence against women (VAW) project was established to test an approach based on this kind of structural analysis. The pilot was founded on the assumption that "[t]he basic cause of violence is rooted in the gender ideology, which promotes male dominance and superiority and women's subordination and subservience" (Huq and Hassan 2004, 16). Consequently, the pilot sought to take a structural approach in addressing violence, working with a range of institutions in the district context, and linking forums at the village level with legal advice services and the local *salish* (justice) and union *parishad* (government) systems. Using the lessons learned, the country office began further work. From an impact inquiry study undertaken in 2006, the following is concluded:

> In summary, the focus of the project is to raise awareness, stimulate dialog between different actors and change the way in which informal and formal institutions and services work. Attention has been paid to working with men as well as women, recognizing the need to change men's attitudes, particularly those of elite men who wield significant power in local political and social relations. Much effort has been directed at trying to transform social structures to make them more likely to promote women's rights including making space in local institutions for women to participate. The major thrust has been to try to build advocacy and services for women's rights, particularly the right to live in freedom from gender-based violence. Changing highly unequal gender relations is essential to reach the project goal (Kanji 2006a, 8–9).

A second case in which using a relational, rights-based methodology has resulted in a much deeper analysis is the Nijeder Janyia Nijera (We for Ourselves) project, also in northwest Bangladesh. Nijera was initiated through a participatory power analysis that was designed to illuminate institutional arrangements and relationships from the union parishad (district) level downwards. The study sought

> to elucidate the ways in which the practices of local-level elites shape governance institutions and present systematic barriers that prevent marginalized groups from participating in democratic processes. It examines how political networks and alliances between powerful actors are fostered and used to gain access to public resources and how elites use these

resources and benefits to build support within local constituencies (Bode 2002, 2).

Most critically, both elites and nonelites were involved in conducting the analysis and mapping decision relationships and their implications. This highlighted various accepted forms of social control through which local leaders assert their domination, as well as the way in which the alliances and factions that underpin power relations shift over time.

Consequently, the Nijera project began to build from the increasingly sophisticated understanding of power relations possessed by the village residents themselves. Community-led total sanitation has been used as an entry point for project facilitators who work with men and women to prioritize initiatives that will have an impact on the social and economic conditions of the poorest households, the majority of which are female-headed (Kanji 2006b, 8). In this process, "natural leaders" emerge from different social economic classes. Kanji concludes:

> Nijera has achieved an enormous amount in a short space of time in terms of building women's agency, supporting them to change relationships in their locality and to pursue their own goals. While there have been fewer changes in the structures which disempower women, women's ability to engage with more powerful actors has increased. The way in which such practices and strategies begin to influence and shape rules and norms [is] also evident (Kanji 2006b, 38).

Kanji also noted that, while there have been many tangible improvements in material well-being, "women and men we spoke to focused on changes in confidence, self-esteem, better relations between women and men, poor and better off, and an ability to negotiate with the more powerful as much as the changes in hygiene, health, hunger and income" (Kanji 2006b, 15). This reflects the difference made in quality of the project's process by its analytically richer starting point, and the fact that the ongoing commitment in Nijera to participatory analysis for each issue villagers identify has ensured that this starting point has not been compromised.

The second contribution through which rights-based approaches have increased the effectiveness of projects in challenging existing power relations and the subordination of women is the explicit use of information about women's rights within projects. This is a critical part of the process of conscientization. In learning about their rights-based entitlements as encoded in national and international constitutions, laws, and policies, women also learn that their subordination is not part of the natural order of things, but is imposed by systems of discrimination that are socially

constructed and that can be altered (Martinez 2002, quoted by Robinson 2004). As one of the Tangail sex workers noted, "We are not corrupt, because we get income for the service we provide, and then we use it to buy food and look after our children. But the [government] Ministers, where do they get their money from?"[11] The same speaker noted that with more education they would less likely have become sex workers—and that the government thus bore a responsibility for their situation and for the future expansion of education provision to girls.

Attempts to pursue women's empowerment that start from the "natural order" of things have tended to founder if they come to question the inequities in this natural order more systematically. Because a rights-based approach to women's empowerment requires the challenge to inequities inherent in social and cultural practices to be posed at the outset, it is much more likely that such efforts will confront gender inequity as an underlying cause of poverty and social injustice.

The third contribution of rights-based approaches is a dialogical approach that challenges men to engage with women, viewing them not as passive recipients of men's largesse, but as cocreators of their intertwined (and occasionally not intertwined) trajectories. Such dialog, building on the first and second contributions, is based on the assumption that cultural attitudes and power relations need to change if women's rights fulfillment is to improve. Dialogical processes of this nature also lead to ideas about power itself being reconceptualized, as is noted from the exchange below recorded from a discussion with village forum and union parishad members involved with the VAW pilot project in Bangladesh. The discussion was prompted by a question on power and the way it is perceived:

Man:	I support changing the way power is seen, and the process whereby it is used. Until now men have consumed this power.
Q:	Why don't you transfer this power to women?
Man (continuing):	This would lead to fights . . . this would be war. It is better to change attitudes.
Woman:	It is not a sustainable solution to transfer power from men to women. The rights and dignity of men as well as women require this attitude to change. If men and women respect each other equally this will contribute better to household income. Everyone's potential will be respected equally, and this will lead to the household being better off, not just economically, but also as a family. There will also be happiness and

love. If we respect each other equally, if we value each other, then there will be love and happiness. Rather than taking power away, it is preferable to talk of the empowerment of women so that they have equal power. (Drinkwater 2005, 15).

The learning from rights-based approaches is allowing a more rapid progress toward addressing gender inequity issues than has occurred previously. For instance, in Niger it took half a decade of experience before the project staff plucked up the courage to engage with the *marabous*. In contrast, in the Bangladesh Nijera and VAW initiatives, more deep-seated forms of change have been initiated almost from the outset. Owing to their more insightful analyses, and to the understanding that power relations and structural factors will have to be addressed, these projects have a clearer sense of purpose, pathway, and teleology from the outset.

Noteworthy too in these projects is the awareness that the external dialog seeking to change attitudes and relationships has to be mirrored by an internal one. In the SHAKTI project, for example, the starting point of recognizing the sex workers as equally human was immensely difficult for the project staff to cope with, especially at the outset. SHAKTI staff were themselves marginalized by other staff in CARE and other NGOs, and had to overcome their own prejudices. At first the sex workers did not trust CARE either, but as they felt the process was helping them open their own eyes, they did learn to trust more. The key process was one of interactive, critical reflection, whereby both staff and sex workers learned together (Magar 2005). This mirrors the later experience of Nijera, which has explicitly used dialogical methods internally to bring about changes in organizational culture and to foster a learning environment for the transition to rights-based approaches (Bode 2007, 1).

If gender inequity is to be addressed, we then all face the challenge of having to deal with the definition of self that we grow up with. As was shown in SHAKTI, an effective project requires a mutual exploration process, and an approach grounded in the evolving solidarity and consciousness of the women concerned. Men must be involved in this process, and the key to overcoming barriers to their participation is for them to see themselves too as beneficiaries. In Niger, the breakthrough that occurred was signaled by one woman who commented that it is now the men who are calling upon other men to defend the rights of women (Sayo 2002).

This is not to presume that there is a single appropriate way of addressing women's inequality. Rather, ways appropriate to different cultural

contexts need to be found. Since men should not be the sole arbiters of "culture," men and women must find ways of engaging together to explore how women can become fully human. In this process, the building of women's solidarity groups can be valuable in altering power relations so that men do start to listen. For instance, in India CARE worked with social development NGO partners to develop a very efficient microsavings approach in order to build the capacity of women's groups, which the partners then used as a basis to help the women take on an expanding social and political agenda (Drinkwater 2007).

In concluding, I'd like to let Dhanvanti Sohvani, a member of the Chunkatta *mahila mandal* and village *gram sabha*, Durg district, Chhattisgarh, have a last say. In finishing an account of her personal story she said:

> You have to talk about equity before we can talk about health. I would love to become more involved in these things. We would like to learn more about empowerment processes, how these have happened in other places. Women's experiences can be so powerful, and we can really learn from each other, so that we don't need to be educated to be able to generate solutions to our problems. I want to introduce the concept of rights for men and women in my village.
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> Men have to face certain realities . . . realize that they have to give up some power[12] in order for things to change for the better (Drinkwater, Singh and Hora 2004).

The addressing of gender inequity requires both individual and collective change. Most fundamentally, if we are to address the root causes of gender inequity, we have to address the definition of self that we all grow up with and the resulting social stereotypes. This process has the potential to yield a perspective under which we are all equally human, and which recognizes that the psychological and structural dimensions of change are at least as important as the material.

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Notes

1. With thanks to Elisa Martinez, who commented on the original draft.

2. "Notes of meeting with former LFSP Gender Officer (Emma Sitambuli)," interview notes for Pinder 2002.

3. "Notes of meeting with former LFSP Gender Officer (Emma Sitambuli)," interview notes for Pinder 2002.

4. Notes from Drinkwater and Sitambuli interviews with Maria and Marron Mungara, February 21, 2002.

5. Notes from Drinkwater and Sitambuli interviews with Amos and Mary Chalaba, February 21, 2002.

6. Stopping HIV/AIDS through Knowledge and Training Initiatives. Established in 1995, originally as a DFID-funded project with sex workers aiming only to increase contraceptive prevalence rates.

7. Magar (2005) quotes one sex worker: "We feel humiliated when we go to the market without shoes on our feet. Everyone looks, hurls slurs and spits on our bare feet in front of all to see."

8. From a 1992 PRA exercise in the Central Province of Zambia.

9. Fieldnotes for research documented in Drinkwater, McEwan and Samuels (2006).

10. Loveness Makonese, in notes on visit to CARE Zimbabwe, November 16, 2004.

11. Fieldnotes for research documented in Drinkwater (2007).

12. Or change the way they perceive power.