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EMPOWERMENT

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REPORT OF THE MID-TERM EVALUATION OF THE WORKING WOMEN'S FORUM, NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2001

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Cover Photo: Mass meeting in Kanchipuram
FOREWORD

We want to thank the Evaluation Support Team consisting of Sri Vidhya Rajagopalan, Egaammai, Prya, Padma, Anitha, Sandhya, Shiva Prasad, Pushpa, Laxmi, Mullai, Sindhuja, Tamilarasi and Suryakumari, for their openness and willingness to share their experience with us, and the way they facilitated and supported our work. We learned a lot from them. We also want to thank the branch co-ordinators, organisers and all other staff, who assisted to collect the data for our evaluation in such a short time. Moreover, we want to express our gratitude for the friendship, love and care we got from all, and which made our stay so comfortable.

We are extremely thankful to Jaya Arunachalam, the president of the Working Women’s Forum. She did her utmost best to answer all our questions, and became never tired to discuss and to explain everything we wanted to know about the Forum’s strategies, activities and empowerment process. She boosted us all the time with her great knowledge, understanding, enthusiasm, vision, suggestions and co-operation. She accompanied the members to various locations and has been also our facilitator and translator during visits to credit groups. Moreover, she looked very well after us, in particular after the health of the team leader when, unfortunately, she became ill and had to stop the mission prematurely.

We thank Joke Muylwijk, first secretary Gender & Development at the Royal Netherlands Embassy, who briefed us at the start of our mission about her experience of her visit to branches of the WWF in Andhra Pradesh.

However, without the generous co-operation and trust of all the poor working women we met, the evaluation could not have been carried out. Therefore, we hope that this evaluation report will contribute to support them in the future.

Kamila Maheen
Sanjay Agarwal
Loes Schenk-Sandbergen (team leader)
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY MID-TERM EVALUATION

Background
The Working Women’s Forum (WWF) is unique at the South Indian Sub-Continent in implementing an empowerment process, which is based on a bottom-up approach, which reaches hundreds of thousands of poor women working in the informal sector. The mission is of the opinion that it is a respectful and outstanding achievement of the WWF, to be capable to reach more than 703,683 women living in abject poverty spread across 15 different socio-cultural contexts (branches), living in 1883 villages and 1562 slums.

In practice, women are mobilised and organised into neighbourhood credit groups, which take short-term loans from a revolving credit society established by WWF in 1981, the Indian Co-operative Network for Women (ICNW). To put it in more theoretical words the ICNW is the practical provider for economic needs. The load of struggling for the strategic needs and rights is on the shoulder of the National Union of Working Women (NUWW). The trade union unionises women workers of the informal sector on trade lines, and pursues to improve, and to empower their living and working conditions. Moreover, the trade union provides leadership, gender and occupational training and organises marches and rallies. The WWF looks after strategic needs in the field of reproductive health programme as a human right, and unites all the needs by facilitating the pre-conditions on which they can bloom.

The WWF works in three States: Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka. A substantial part of the activities is carried out in Chennai (Madras). But the outreach of the Forum goes far beyond the three State Boundaries through the National Union of Working women, and the transfer of WWF’s experience and training to national/international groups. The empowerment methodology of the WWF has inspired other NGO’s, people’s organisations and institutions. Representatives of these organisations were trained and had exposure visits to the branches. WWF has built up a network of partner organisations (including Government leaders as the Panchayat leaders of Madhya Pradesh) in order to link up and to facilitate their outreach to the poor.

The evaluation team found that the WWF is in many places the only support network poor women really can count on. Politicians, councillors, Government departments, charity- and church organisations have not shown real interest in them, or promised improvements in times of elections that were not realised. Therefore, being a member of the WWF, or, as the women name the WWF as ‘Sangam’ (organisation), is not perceived by the members as a functional matter, but has strong personal and emotional connotations. That is why in the Indian culture the poor women associate the Sangam, with a ‘foster’ family, and its president, with ‘amma’, a mother, who cares for them with love. The atmosphere at mass meetings testifies to this special relation. The WWF’s identity is very important for its cohesion and high participation of poor women.

1 The total number of members depends on the definition used, and the timing that membership is measured. The 10 months rotation basis makes it difficult to have an overview of members at a yearly basis. It depends if cumulative figures are used or just the membership at a certain moment. The 703,683 members are 2002 figures mentioned in a document with gives the details of membership as on Sept 2001: another document (power point presentation) from the beginning of 2001, mentions 600,000 members. According to the financial expert in the mission there is only an active membership base of around 100,000 women. This will be clarified in Chapter 6.
The mission of August 1996 stated: "The Working Women's Forum is immensely successful and powerful in its effort to support survival strategies and to empower poor and very poor women working in the informal sector in slums in cities, in villages, in forest areas and living along the sea shore." The mission of December 2001 firmly repeats this conclusion in this mid-term evaluation.

**Context**

The evaluation team found, that the main rationale of the WWF's policy, namely, to reduce the poverty of, and to empower, poor women working in the informal sector is more valid than ever. In fact the mission had the impression that an increasing poverty, and in particular a feminisation of poverty, could be noticed as a dire reality in the locations where the Working Women's Forum (WWF) is working. The national New Economic Policy (NEP), related to the process of globalisation hits the poorest women the most. The mission found a sad systematic trend that the successful impact of the credit programme is undermined at a quick pace by the effects of the price rises, inflation and lagging behind of wages and income. Women are compelled to work longer, and to make all the time higher investments while their profits remain the same or have not increased proportionally. During our stay the price for milk went up to Rs 13 a litre, while, for example, matchbox makers earn Rs 9.50 a day. The prices for transport went up, and this hit the Forum directly in the bus fares they have to pay for their staff. The main cause for the increasing feminisation of poverty is also related to the seemingly increasing male alcoholism.

The full realisation of the economic and social core facts should be the context to assess the activities of the Working Women's Forum. The foreshadowed problems are of crucial importance for our analysis, and determine the character of our recommendations.

The Forum has not witnessed these developments in silence. It has responded in many ways to counteract the above-mentioned undermining economic forces. In that sense the past five years were a time of transformation and innovation.

The mission noticed important changes in policies and strategies in the past five years to cope with the changing economic conditions. One of the most spectacular changes is that 'heavy' loans are given to individual women. In the lapse of the second and third phase (around 1997), when there was a lack of funds, the WWF decided in 1997 to give bigger loans to individual women entrepreneurs. This was a major change in the policies of the WWF as the credo, 'better to give many women small loans than a few big ones', was for years a leading principle. Group credit is the key-point in the ideology of the WWF. However, the effects of the New Economic Policies and globalisation, which offered employment opportunities for a few better-off women, in combination with the confrontation of lack of funds, led to this decision. It implied also less work for the organisers, trainers and bank staff, and less chance for defaulting.

However, the mission found that this does not mean that the WWF has given up its solid grass root character, in which women from the poorest layers of society are the main managers, trainers and leaders of the organisation. These women are still the hard-core, knowing how to reach the poorest women and to win their confidence and trust on the basis of their own similar life-experience. They still run the branches of the Forum in their own way and work style, which gives great strength to the carrying capacity of the organisation.
**Financial sustainability: yes or no?**

According to the WWF, they are almost financially sustainable under the condition that they consolidate their activities and remain 'static' in future. No expansion of groups, organisers, trainers, extra training programme, trade union work and expansion of partnership network will be possible. The achieved sustainability is based on consolidation of the routine activities and current size of membership.

The financial expert in the mission has analysed the financial sustainability of the Forum, and it is his finding, that the WWF and sister organisations are **not** sustainable at the moment. He states:

"Given the program design and the structure of financial markets, the WWF credit program cannot become financially self-sufficient at any time in foreseeable future. Further, in order to maintain its program focus, it would continue to require regular grant-based financial inputs." (See chapter 6)

Moreover, it is the finding of the financial expert that,

"the endowment fund at WWF has not been set up according to Netherlands proposal for phase III and that the WWF needs further inputs on understanding endowment management (chapter 6)."

In other words, there is a contradiction in opinions about the current financial sustainability and endowment issue between the Forum and the financial expert in the mission. The financial expert in the mission and the WWF agree, that in future financial support of a donor will be necessary to continue and to expand the activities of the WWF.

**It is recommended to send financial experts to the WWF to clarify the contradiction between the Working Women's Forum and the financial expert of the mission regarding financial sustainability and the endowment fund issue.**

**Main findings Organisational**

Sustainability has also organisational, social, ideological and human resource dimensions. Therefore, the dimensions and extent of self-reliance in management-, empowerment- and staff capacity have been investigated and analysed. Moreover, the question, if full autonomy of the branches is 'possible' and 'desirable' has been addressed.

Another matter that is not ignored is, if the role of the head office and the president can be taken over by the branches and branch co-ordinators, who are for the majority women raised by the Forum itself. For the time being the answer is 'no'. The head office and a strong leader as the president, is an absolute necessity, in particular in the Indian context. It is understandable that the president wants to move the WWF as much as possible to the right direction: towards its consolidating phase of its operations as a tacit prelude to strengthen the WWF in an optimal way to be ready for the future.

There is a clear division of tasks between the WWF, ICNW and NUWW. The tasks support and nurture each other. The three organisations play also their own specific role in the empowerment process. Each organisation contributes in its own way to the four components of empowerment: economic, socio-cultural, physical and political.
The organisational, managerial, social, human resource dimensions the branches have a high autonomy profile. Policies are uniformly replicated, accepted and implemented. Planning and decision-making in the branches have a high level of bottom-up approach. Transparency and accountability are self-evident matters within the branches. The annual meetings in each branch around December focus on accountability of planning and real implementation of the work. Successes, problems, constraints and favourable situations are discussed with all involved groups in the branches and from the head office.

The success and strength of the WWF is based on the unusual wisdom that leadership should come from the membership itself. The Forum is very successful in integrating poor women at all levels in the institutional and organisational framework, which highly benefits the delivery system to reach a large numbers of poor women. Local leadership can be traced at every level of the stakeholder groups involved in the activities of the Forum. The Forum is building up leadership capacity for self-respect and self-development, and earning an income.

**The leadership that comes from the membership itself gives the branches of the Forum a very high intrinsic social, human resource and leadership sustainability.**

The mission found that in the head office and visited branches the staff had outspoken leadership qualities in terms of managerial and ideological qualities. Their social and gender commitment and capacities in the head office in Chennai and the branches are impressive.

Even if branches might become financially self-reliant, the mission would consider it as undesirable to pursue full autonomy of the branches for the following reasons:

- it will decrease the strong cohesion, and perception of WWF ‘sangam’ identity of the branches and its members;
- it will weaken collective trade union actions and solidarity with weaker branches;
- it will decrease the level of sharing experience and problem solving;
- skills, capacity, expertise and authority to take over tasks and roles of the head office in Chennai are, for the time being, not available and adequate at the local branches;
- it will be impossible to recruit at each branch specialised staff, or to hire consultants, in marketing, trade union work, reproductive health, etc;
- it might endanger and decrease the level of empowerment, as branches might be forced, because of shortage of funds and staff, to change their basic pro-poor policies, etc

**Main findings Credit programme**

The credit programme has reached the poorest of the poor women in the informal sector, enabling them to access the institutional credit at lower interest rates, thus enabling them to come out of heavy indebtedness in many locations and livelihood of the women. Many women have ventured into trade/business/productive activities with the help of credit assistance and there are innumerable numbers of stories of women who have not decided to commit suicide because of a positive livelihood option in the form of credit support.
The women in general were able to make a livelihood option on their own right by taking a kind of self-employment, which generates an average wage of rupees 20/- (the range from 4 rupees to 30 rupees in most cases and in saree and other hotel industries in thousands of rupees a month). The women refer to the "profit" in most cases, which is just their opportunity labour costs in the particular trades.

The increase in assets are ownership of tools for the trade, improvements in the housing conditions, purchase of jewels, and livestock in rural areas, TVS, grinders, and mixers. The important contribution were also relating to educating their girl as well boy children, setting up business for the sons, arranging marriage celebrations for the daughters. There are few reported incidences of changes in the mindset of men towards respecting and recognizing the women’s roles.

SCENARIO'S FOR THE FUTURE

The collected data, discussions and analysis as indicated in the previous lead to several scenarios for recommendation in the second half of Phase III, and beyond 2004.

**Scenario 1**: The majority of local branches will be able to achieve financial sustainability by maintaining the 10% in the local office to meet the costs of social mobilisation and training at the end of Phase III. Consolidation and a 'static' situation of all activities is the assumption on which this sustainability is based.

In this option the mid-term evaluation team strongly recommends the Dutch Government to continue the financial assistance to the credit programme in the second half of Phase III to enable WWF to attain a more solid self-reliant base.

However, this kind of branch sustainability might endanger the pro-poor policy and empowerment effort. Because of lack of funds of the rotating capital no expansion of other credit groups might be able, and the danger exists that branches are forced to shift to less pro-poor decisions, as e.g. to give 'heavy' loans to individual women. That might mean less work and more chance for good return rates. Or, they might be compelled to increase the interest rate, which will also decrease the reaching out to the poorest women.

Moreover, the previous analysis indicated that it is not 'desirable' to make the branches autonomous in all respects. This will mean a serious loss of the organisational and ideological sustainability that has been achieved over the years. So to say, to cut-off the head office from the branches will wash the cement out of the building and it is questionable if the building will hold on for some time without this crucial ingredient.

**Scenario 2**: Consolidation of activities, as a pre-condition for financial sustainability is unrealistic and against the pro-poor policy of the Forum. The consequences of the above-sketched increasing feminisation of poverty scenario will, no doubt, imply that the demand, and pressure, on the WWF to form more credit groups, to support more individual women in dire need of credit, will only increase. It might also mean that the Forum will be forced to increase the loan amounts for starters and running groups, and that even they might be

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2 Scenario 1 is following broadly the assumptions of the Forum regarding their almost sustainability as described in Annex 3.
pressured to decrease the interest rate. It will mean that more group leaders, organisers, area organisers, trainers, bank staff, administrative and support staff has to be appointed for which more finance and training will be required. And, not the least, more partner groups will be interested to be trained in the empowerment methodology, and to get a helping hand in the implementation of the training in their practice. More donor support will be necessary, preferable in grant support.

The WWF is also very well aware that the 'static' sustainability is unrealistic, as it is threatened by increasing poverty, and feminisation of poverty as an effect of various causes (class-, caste-, gender aspects, NEP and globalisation, etc). Social and economic dynamics will urge the WWF to accelerate their expansion of group forming, increase activities and to appointment more (specialised) staff in the future.

Therefore scenario 2 implies that it will be an absolute necessity that at 'two levels' donor funds have to be acquired in the second half of Phase III and beyond 2004, namely, at the level of the branches and at the level of the head office in Chennai. Expansion of credit groups, increase in loan amounts, more field staff, and more trade union work in the branches can only be met with a 'heavy' financial support from outside funds. The tasks at the head office in particular in delivering expertise on marketing, occupational health, trade union work, advocacy, giving platform training, research and monitoring, etc will require also in the future substantial funds.

In this scenario the mid-term evaluation team also strongly recommends the Dutch Government to continue the financial assistance to the credit programme in the second half of Phase III, to enable WWF to reach out as much as possible to poor women in the informal sector through the credit programme. Moreover, the WWF will be able to follow the recommendations in the following during the second part of Phase III.

Moreover, it is recommended that the Dutch Government supports the Forum (or a linked wing devoted to replication or 'franchising' the empowerment methodology) as a nodal office for net-work funding beyond 2004. As this will require responsibilities of approving and monitoring grants qualified staff and facilities should be required.

It is also suggested that the Dutch Government supports/facilitates the access to other possible donor channels beyond 2004 that can be explored for funding at the two levels mentioned in the above.

The mission strongly recommends to follow the suggestions of scenario 2

Scenario 3
This envisaged scenario is a doom scenario, and envisages that in future the poverty might deepen so much that the real poorest women will not at all be able to carry on with their small jobs any more. In this blackest scenario poor women might not be able to make any profit out of the few hundred rupees loan, let alone that they can repay the loan and interest. The fact that overdue is increasing since the past three years, and that utilisation of funds has come down since 1999, might be indications that the economic conditions have hit the poorest in a deadly way. More study is necessary to investigate this assumption as lack of field bank staff might also play a role. This scenario 3 implies that

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3 The data are mentioned in chapter 6 in the paragraph 'arrears situation'.

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the recommendations of scenario 2 have to be implemented in a much more intensive and funds requiring way.

Other Recommendations as corrections and adjustments in the second part of Phase III.

Organisational
1. To appoint more organisers, area leaders, trainers and to upgrade their economic and occupational knowledge.
2. To strengthen the branch co-ordinators with professional skills
3. To strengthen the Trade Union wing in all respects at all levels

Credit Programme
1. To increase the loans in the credit groups.
2. To pay more attention to the gender issue in terms of responsibilities of men.
3. To pay attention to the access and control of benefits for older women.

Training
The following improvements in training were observed by the mission during the past 5 years:
• more trainers for the training of credit members have been appointed (see above);
• the teaching material/visuals are upgraded and modernised (including the specific occupational/branch gender visuals);
• a nice and clear training manual for trainers has been produced and is used in all the branches by the local trainers;
• for each new loan the women get one day formal training (five years ago only two times). The second training has a focus on occupational health;

Although much have been done, the mission recommends the following types of training to improve the work

- Economic-, Skill- and Occupational training for trainers, organisers, members of credit groups

It was still found that the economic awareness and knowledge on the feasibility and viability of micro entrepreneurial activities of the credit group members and the organisers can be improved. The women are to be trained on cost-benefit of their trades such that they are able to estimate the risks as well the real profits. Although there is counselling on the subject by the bank field officer and in the credit group training, it is felt that the trainers/organisers should be upgraded in their knowledge. We suggest to invite specialist from a training Institute and to organise an extra day training for leaders and members of credit groups.

- Improvement of gender and development and social analysis training, in particular on gender relations, the role of women and the responsibilities of men (alcoholism).

This has been discussed in the previous.

- Continuation of the training in 'alternative livelihood' in Vellore and replication in other branches.
- **Study- tours**

It is recommended to support study-tours for ICNW and Forum field and office staff to other national and international successful organisations or programmes related to the work of the Forum. The exposure to wider horizons might raise new inspiration and ideas for the diversification of income generating activities, management and financial skills, and other types of trade-union action that might be taken up.

- **More training for trade-union staff**

In view of the still existing feudal labour relations (pledging, patronage, middle men) and capitalist exploitation found in all the branches, it is strongly recommended to support the trade-union staff with all ways and means. Dutch embassy might send an trade-union expert to investigate the needs of the WWF trade-union staff.

- **Linkages to Government resources**

It is the opinion of the evaluation team that the WWF should give more effort to link up with Government programmes and resources. In the credit programme there are not many links to the outside world. In order to assist the process of diversification of income generating and to mediate in obtaining resources from Government programmes more linkages with all kinds of Government Departments might be pursued which might also assist in training.

- **Advocacy**

As we saw even rape and murder cases are not reported at the police and the criminals not punished. To take up a real advocacy role implies that the WWF should have an in-house qualified lawyer, and has access to the judicature. The WWF itself is still thinking of appointing one person in each branch to take on the responsibilities of advocacy, and the strengthening overall external linkages in order to negotiate at their respective district and state levels. These initiatives should be supported as much as possible. Currently, these issues are dealt with by the grassroots women, when their efforts fail the cases are brought to the attention of the head office to lobby with the state government.

**Partnership training and training centre**

The mission want to emphasise the utmost importance of the replication of the 'leading role model' by other NGO's, government institutions and other projects that are related to survival and empowerment strategies of the poor.

Therefore, the functioning of the WWF, as a nodal office for donor support for partnership organisation is wholeheartedly supported by the mission under the condition that a special training department with qualified staff will look after the work.

A new training centre will be necessary in this pursuit. Land and (old) building, adjacent to the head office has been acquired for that purpose. More funds will be necessary to renovate/reconstruct the purchased training centre. The 'renovated' centre can also reduce the lack of space of the regular credit group training and numerous other meetings.
Studies
The research and monitoring cell in WWF can be strengthened by a guest participatory course in social science (in particular qualitative, PRA) methodology. The ‘teacher’ should be a senior with long experience in practical gender studies. It should be a ‘learning-by-doing’ exercise with a few days classroom training.

The course can use one of the following subjects for which studies are suggested:

- 'the situation of debt-bondage among the Women Silk Weavers of Kanchipuram town in Tamil Nadu State of India’. Sri Vydhia Rajagopal, co-ordinator at the head office in Chennai, has already drawn up an excellent research proposal.

- The impact of alcoholism on the living conditions of women in rural and urban areas,

- The male dominance in loan supported productive activities in rural areas.


Network-funding.
Funding a network through WWF would mean that WWF would have to take on responsibilities of approving and monitoring grants. This requires substantial effort if it is to be executed properly. The profile of staff required for this role is also different from that of the present WWF team.

It is our suggestion, therefore, that if the Netherlands Embassy and WWF wish to explore this avenue, then they may wish to consider setting up a wing organisation linked to WWF, and devoted to expanding / ‘franchising’ the credit program.

Recommendation beyond 2004 of the financial expert.
As indicated earlier, a credit program such as this cannot become self-sufficient in the foreseeable future. In 'our' view, the expectation of self-sufficiency for such a program is based on an erroneous financial premise. The program itself is administered quite well and is benefitting many women in one way or the other. The Netherlands Embassy may, therefore, wish to consider continuing its financial relationship with WWF / ICNW beyond 2004 as well.

In such a case, WWF should feel free to look at other sources of grant funds for meeting part of the operating expenses. This would be relatively easy for WWF, considering the depth, management and quality of its credit program. The Netherlands Embassy could also consider facilitating this process of identifying alternate donors.

Concluding remark team leader.
The team leader endorses the above recommendation beyond 2004 of the financial expert. The Netherlands Embassy might reconsider her decision not to continue its financial relationship with the WWF beyond 2004. Main reason for the reconsideration is, that evaluations and studies show that the funding of the WWF guarantees that the poorest women (households) in India are successfully reached, which should have the highest priority in the light of the 'new' world wide awareness (after 11 September 2001) that all ways and means have to be used, to reduce the increasing polarisation between the rich and the poor.
1. PERSPECTIVE AND METHODOLOGY OF THE EVALUATION MISSION

1.1 THE WORKING WOMEN'S FORUM, OBJECTIVES AND STRATEGIES

The Working Women's Forum (WWF) is unique at the South Indian Sub-Continent in implementing an empowerment process, which is based on a bottom-up approach, which reaches hundred thousands of poor women working in the informal sector. The mission is of the opinion that it is a respectful and outstanding achievement of the WWF, to be capable to reach more than 703,683 women living in abject poverty spread across 15 different socio-cultural contexts (branches), living in 1883 villages and 1562 slums.

The WWF began in Madras city in 1978, established by Mrs. Dr. Jaya Arunachalam, with an initial membership of 800 women. The goals from the beginning on were to form a political 'poor women intensive organisation'. That means, an organisation in which the planning, management and implementation is carried out exclusively 'by' poor women 'for' poor women. Poor women working in the informal sector are not perceived as 'beneficiaries', or as the 'target group'. They are considered as full participants in the organisation: even as the 'owners' of the organisation.

The original objectives and concepts of 1978, as struggle against gender, class, and caste oppression, grass roots leadership, spirit of solidarity and collective identity, self help among the poor, neighbourhood peer group support and peer group pressure, are still the basic pillars of the WWF.

In practice women are mobilised and organised into neighbourhood credit groups, which take short – term loans from a revolving credit society established by WWF in 1981, the Indian Cooperative Network for Women (ICNW). To put it in more theoretical words the ICNW is the practical provider for economic needs. The load of struggling for the strategic needs and rights is on the shoulder of the National Union of Working Women (NUWW). The trade union unionizes women workers of the informal sector on trade lines, and pursue to improve and to empower their living and working conditions. Moreover, the trade union provides leadership, gender and occupational training and organizes marches and rallies. The WWF looks after strategic needs in the field of reproductive health programme as a human right and unites all the needs by facilitating the pre-conditions on which they can bloom.

The survival and empowerment design requires a holistic approach to bring practical and strategic needs together as social mobilization, credit, gender awareness trade-union, services (night schools, education for child labourers) and training and replication of the empowerment methodology. All components are very much integrated and nurture and support each other. The credit programme of the WWF integrates, as Robert Chambers

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4 The total number of members depends on the definition used, and the timing that membership is measured. The 10 months rotation basis makes it difficult to have an overview of members at a yearly basis. It depends if cumulative figures are used or just the membership at a certain moment. The 703,683 members are 2002 figures mentioned in a document with gives the details of membership as on Sept 2001 (see annex 4): another document (power point presentation) from the beginning of 2001, mentions 600,000 members. According to the financial expert in the mission there is only an active membership base of around 100,000 women. This will be clarified in Chapter 6
(1985) has formulated it, the struggle against class exploitation, caste inferiority, male dominance, isolation in a closed world and physical weakness. There are also other services and incentives with link programmes and women and children, participating in the organisations. Children for the night school are mainly selected from the households of the members of the credit groups and also, as long as they are child labourers, from the same neighbourhood. The major effort of the WWF is aimed to strengthen poor women (and their children) in such a way that they can liberate themselves from the vicious circle of indebtedness, exploitation, class-, and caste discrimination, and gender subordination.

The history of the Forum is well documented⁵ (see Annex Bibliography external publications on WWF). As said in the 1996 evaluation report, the WWF has gone itself during the 23 years of its existence (1978-2001) through a process of (r)evolution, in which it has widened its economic scope and sharpened its interpretation and implementation of the components of the empowerment process and methodology. Its experience from 23 years practice is that economic empowerment (the credit programme) is the basic pre-condition for the generation of social and political empowerment.

Again (the same as in 1996), women in the slums and villages expressed that the WWF is the only support network poor women really can count on. In comparison with 1996 there is no change in this situation. Politicians, councillors, Government departments, charity- and church organisations have not shown real interest in them, or promised improvements in times of elections that were hardly, or not, realised. Therefore, being a member of the WWF, or, as the women name the WWF as 'Sangam' (organisation), is not perceived by the members as a functional matter, but has strong personalistic and emotional connotations. That is why in the Indian culture the poor women associate the Sangam, with ‘foster’ family, and its president, with 'amma', a mother who cares for them with love. The atmosphere at mass meetings testifies to this special relation. This WWF identity is very important for its cohesion and high participation of poor women.

In view of this perspective, the mid-term evaluation of the Working Women’s Forum requires an outlook from mission members which goes far beyond rationale concepts as efficiency and adequacy of micro-credit and women entrepreneurs. The meaning and impact of the credit programme cannot be expressed in only financial, economic terminology, but has to be assessed equally in term of social, political and human (women's) rights impact. The emotions of a mother (saree weaver) who is able because of a WWF loan, to release her children, pledged as interest to a money lender, cannot be expressed in money (or words). The fact that women working in the informal sector of different poor castes, communities and religious origin join together and pursue to demolish patriarchal and social traditional barriers, fight together for better labour conditions and relations, against male violence, against state intimidation and terror, discrimination of the girl-child, and for better public amenities is a small revolution in the Indian context.

In the lapse of the second and third phase (around 1997), when there was a lack of funds, the WWF decided in 1997 to give bigger loans to individual women entrepreneurs. This was a major change in the policies of the WWF as the credo, 'better to give many women small loans than a few big ones', was for years a leading principle. Group credit is the key-point in the ideology of the WWF. However, the effects of the New Economic Policies and

⁵ See: Social platform through social innovations - A coalition with women in the informal sector-
WWF, India, Chennai 2000.
globalisation, which offered employment opportunities for a few better-off women, in combination with the confrontation of lack of funds, led to this decision. It implied also less work for the organisers, trainers and bank staff, and less chance for defaulting.

However, the mission found that this does not mean that the WWF has given up its solid grass root character, in which women from the poorest layers of society are the main managers, trainers and leaders of the organisation. These women are still the hard-core, knowing how to reach the poorest women and to win their confidence and trust on the basis of their own similar life-experience. They still run the branches of the Forum in their own way and work style, which, as said before, gives great strength to the carrying capacity of the organisation.

The WWF works in three States: Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka. A substantial part of the activities is carried out in Madras. But the outreach of the Forum goes far beyond the three State Boundaries through the National Union of Working women, and the transfer of WWF’s experience and training to national/international groups. The empowerment methodology of the WWF has inspired other NGO's, people’s organisations and institutions. Representatives of these organisations were trained and had exposure visits to the branches. WWF has built up a network of partner organizations (including Government leaders as the Panchayat leaders of Madhya Pradesh) in order to link up and to facilitate their outreach to the poor.

The mission of August 1996 stated: "The Working Women’s Forum (WWF) is immensely successful and powerful in its effort to support survival strategies and to empower poor and very poor women working in the informal sector in slums in cities, in villages, in forest areas and living along the sea shore." The mission of December 2001 firmly repeats this conclusion in this mid-term evaluation and hopes that it will reflect in the following.

1.2 PERSPECTIVE AND OBJECTIVES OF THE EVALUATION

In 1987, the Government of the Netherlands, the Directorate-General of International Cooperation (DGIS) became the primary donor, and only foreign donor, of the Forum. At that time, a five-year proposal for Rs 12,020,750 to cover five years (1987-1991) was submitted to and approved by the Dutch Government. The main aim of the programme was credit assistance and employment, to improve the living and working conditions and to strengthen the bargaining power of poor working class women. In May 1990, a three-member Evaluation Team visited the WWF’s operations in two states. On the basis of its findings DGIS decided to support the second Phase (1992-1997) for a total amount of Dfl 1,717,970 (at current rate Rs. 34,359,400). According to the agreement between WWF and the Dutch Government, an evaluation of the second Phase of the project was carried out in 1996. The findings of the evaluation were positive and the mission recommended continuing the credit programme support in the III rd phase to enable WWF to expand and increase loans. However, the mission also recommended that the Netherlands assistance should be limited to the third and final phase for a period of 5 years in which the WWF has to become self-reliant. The third and final phase was initiated in January 1998 for a duration of 6.5 years, up to June 2004. The Dutch contribution is Dfl. 2,830,823,00 maximum. It was also agreed that a mid-term review would be planned in 2001 in order to recommend, if necessary, mid-course corrections, budget adjustments and a long term (business) plan leading towards self-sufficiency and independence of WWF.
Financial sustainability
In this report the findings of the mid term mission are recorded. As said in the previous the WWF wants to become sustainable and the mission of 1996 supported that aspiration. What is the situation five years later? The latest document of the WWF on the sustainability question states:

“In view of the present financial capacity of the branches, which varies per branch (old and new ones) the accumulation process is in progress. Rotating capital for the credit programme is at this moment partly accrued out of the grant of the Dutch government, the interest rate of 18% and the deposited shares (Rs 20/- 10% of the credit). At the moment the credit programme covers the direct operational costs, in which the inflation costs are included, out of 8% of the interest. 10% goes to the Women's Forum to finance new branches and overall training costs and to accumulate a small endowment fund. At the moment the branches have an allotment of their finances as agreed upon at the annual meetings in December to cover costs for personnel, buildings, maintenance, travel, training etc. It is estimated that these costs can be met in the near future out of the proceeds of the total interest rate of 18%. In future the remaining interest of 10% will remain in the branches, and the ICNW will take responsibility of salaries of the credit organisers.” (See Annex 3)

This means, that according to the WWF, they are almost financially sustainable under the condition that they consolidate their activities and remain 'static' in future. No expansion of groups, organisers, trainers, extra training programme, trade union work and expansion of partnership network will be possible. The achieved sustainability is based on consolidation of the routine activities and current size of membership.

However, the WWF is very well aware that this kind of sustainability is unrealistic, as it is threatened by increasing poverty, and feminisation of poverty as an effect of various causes (class-, caste-, gender aspects, NEP and globalisation, etc). In the next chapter we will briefly sketch the background of the increasing (feminisation) of poverty. It is likely, that these social and economic dynamics will urge the WWF to accelerate their expansion of group forming, increase activities and to appointment more (specialised) staff in the future.

The financial expert in the mission has analysed the financial sustainability of the Forum, and it is his finding, that the WWF and sister organisations are not sustainable at the moment and:

"Given the program design and the structure of financial markets, the WWF credit program cannot become financially self-sufficient at any time in foreseeable future. Further, in order to maintain its program focus, it would continue to require regular grant-based financial inputs." (See chapter 6)

Moreover, it is the finding of the financial expert that,

"the endowment fund at WWF has not been set up according to Netherlands proposal for phase III and that the WWF needs further inputs on understanding endowment management (chapter 6)."

In other words, there is a contradiction in opinions about the current financial sustainability and endowment issue between the Forum and the financial expert in the mission. The financial expert in the mission and the WWF agree, that in future financial support of a donor will be necessary to continue and to expand the activities of the WWF. The evidence of the findings of the financial expert will be shown in chapter 6.

Recommendation: It is recommended to send financial experts to the WWF to clarify this contradiction.
Other dimensions of sustainability
What is sustainability? Sustainability is not only a question of financial matters. Sustainability has also organisational, social, ideological and human resource dimensions. If the Forum envisages financial sustainability of the branches in future, then we have to know their 'autonomy' capacity and self-reliance potential to be sure that they will be able to stand on their own feet. Therefore, the dimensions and extent of self-reliance in management-, empowerment- and staff capacity have been investigated and analysed, but with the scenario in mind that full sustainability of the branches and the head office will be unrealistic in view of the need for expansion due to the economic and social conditions.

Moreover, the question cannot be ignored, if full autonomy or sustainability of the branches will be 'desirable'.

Another matter, that cannot be ignored either, is, if the role of the president can be taken over by the branch co-ordinators who are for the majority women raised by the Forum itself. Can the president with her status, prestige, authority and leadership be replaced by the local co-ordinators in case she might resign in a few years? Although this is a very delicate matter, it is understandable that the President wants to move the WWF as much as possible to the right direction: towards its consolidating phase of its operations.

Besides, it can be asked if the branches will be able to have 'in-house' the specialised occupational expertise necessary in future to cope with quick and modern developments in various sectors, from global marketing techniques to computer skills.

Moreover, the sustainability is of course very much dependent on the future success of the credit programme. What are the changes that can be envisaged and suggested in view of the changing needs of women embedded in a quick changing economic world? It is also in this perspective that a detailed analysis of the functioning, impact and future requirements of the credit programme will be presented.

Terms of Reference
The Directorate-General developed the Terms of Reference for the Evaluation Mission for International Cooperation (DGIS) in coordination with the Working Women's Forum. The broad purpose of the evaluation as stated in the Terms of Reference (TOR) was as follows:

The progress and activities of Working Women's Forum Phase III will be reviewed to assess how successful its immediate objectives are being achieved, and to identify flourishing and restraining factors which impact the capacity of the Forum in realising the empowerment of poor urban and rural women.

The Mission should pay particular attention to the appropriateness and productivity of the credit provided, competence and strength of the staff to manage the Credit Programme, and also look into the process of strengthening of women's control over their own livelihood.

The issues to be covered in the evaluation, as stated in the Terms of References are listed in Annex I. The Evaluation Team was composed of one small credit and micro enterprise expert, one financial expert and a gender and institutional expert (team leader).
The team visited the following branches Chennai, Dindigul, Adhiramapattinam, Kanchipuram, Vellore, Bangalore, Hyderabad, Narsapuram, Malkipuram (see Itinerary Annex 2). The duration of the evaluation mission was from 26th of November to 19th of December 2001.

1.3 METHODOLOGY

To assess the impact of the credit programme, the evaluation team followed a mixed method during field visits, consisting of a sort of a condensed re-visiting and Participatory Gender Assessment approach. In Chennai two groups have been re-visited, which the team leader visited also in 1996. The base-line data of 1996 were very useful to get an impression of the changes during the past five years. This gave an interesting time- and follow-up perspective in the assessment, reflecting the quick economic changes and inflation effects, and the social dynamics in the re-visited households.

The methodology includes study of relevant documents, meetings with the management, staff and leaders of WWF, field visits to areas of operations as agreed upon with the Forum and accompanied by the staff members, organisers and leaders of the area. Discussions were held with the staff members of the respective branches visited, followed by meetings with organisers, group/individual discussions with members. In a few places, mass meetings were held in branches where the members, leaders could share their testimonies.

With groups, participatory tools were used to elicit information. The women were met both at their work places and at their dwelling places. Mrs Kamila met a total of 9 out of 15 branches and 23 areas consisting of about 530 women during the process of this review. In total 11 out of 15 branches were visited.

1.4 COMPOSITION OF THE REPORT

The composition of the report follows broadly the order of the points in the Terms of Reference, and is divided in section A, B, C and D, respectively the organisational analysis, the credit programme analyses, training and internal review and financial viability.

In chapter 2, titled, ‘context of and coping with feminisation of poverty’, a brief sketch is presented of the harsh soc-economic and political context in which the work of the WWF is embedded. In chapter 3 an effort is made to describe and appraise the organisational structure in relation to the empowerment approach in all its dimensions. The possibility and implications of a scenario in which the branches in future might achieve self-reliance, and the implications for the relation between the branches and the head office will be sketched. In chapter 4 the findings of the visits to 11 branches of the credit programme and case studies will be presented, to illustrate the meaning and impact of the credit programme on the life and work of the poor women members in a qualitative way. Chapter 5 in which attention will be paid to the training component of the WWF will follow this. In chapter 6 the financial analysis on the credit performance and the self-sufficiency question will be analysed. In the last chapter, 7, the evaluation will present its findings and recommendations for the second part of Phase III and for the future.
2. CONTEXT OF AND COPING WITH FEMINISATION OF POVERTY

Sheela is young, beautiful and very poor. Her baby of 6 months sleeps in her lap during the meeting. She wanted to commit suicide. The leader of the matchbox makers credit group rescued her. The credit support opened a small horizon of survival for her and her baby. Sheela is one of many. (Field notes, Vellore)

2.1 NEP, PRICE-HIKES, MALE ALCOHOLISM

The evaluation team found, that the main rationale of the WWF's policy, namely, to reduce the poverty of, and to empower, poor women working in the informal sector is more valid than ever. In fact the mission had the impression that an increasing feminisation of poverty could be noticed as a dire reality in the locations where the Working Women's Forum (WWF) is working.

As shown in women's studies the costs of poverty are more on the shoulders of the women than men. Poverty is not equally distributed over men and women, but burdens women the most. The reasons are known, and will not be reiterated in this report. The national New Economic Policy (NEP), related to the process of globalisation hits the poorest women the most (see: report of WWF, 1996, 21-26; GROOTS, Vol.5 Issue 12). Many women studies have shown that the economic policies of growth and modernization tend to marginalise poor Indian women. There has been an increase of women in the informal sector, as an effect of a loss of livelihood and employment for women due to technological changes, loss of access to, and depletion of land, forest and raw materials, and replacement and deskilling of women's work. Child (girl) labour has increased, and the domestic workload of women has mounted up by the environmental crisis. These trends have been documented long before the New Economic Policy was implemented. Therefore, one should be cautious to impute only the NEP for the current negative economic impact. It can be stated that the NEP has exacerbated and intensified the problems in a short time which is, for example, reflected in the exorbitant price rise on food while women's wages and income have declined in real terms. The prices rise on food is broadly due to the high domestic inflation rates that came about as the economic reforms progressed.

Studies have shown that because of NEP women have even less access to basic necessities such as food, shelter, clothes and water as in earlier decades. Professor Maithreyi Krishnaraj states in her article on, Globalisation and Women in India (1999):

"To sum up, the process of liberalisation, privatisation, and globalisation will put the clock back for women (and for the poor in general). As it is, women constitute 70% of the world's poor and two-thirds of the world's illiterates. In India, female literacy after 50 years of public education is a poor 33.9 per cent. Female infant mortality is still absurdly high in this age of progress, being 104 per 1000 live birth. Inequalities will grow. The top 20 per cent of our population today enjoys an income 50 times more than the bottom 20 per cent; the latter barely get 9 per cent of the national income. Even 40 per cent of our population get only 21.3 per cent of the national income. The rise in AIDS and prostitution are ominous portents. The return of tuberculosis and malaria are other warnings of what happens when public health, nutrition, and sanitation are neglected. The high level of air and water pollution is a price we are paying for uncontrolled expansion in the name of economic growth…. In our context of massive inequality and deprivation, liberalisation and globalisation need
to have different priorities. The state must fulfil its mandate for the social development of its people on whose toiling shoulders it stands” (p 591)

The mission found a sad systematic trend that the successful impact of the credit programme is undermined at a quick pace by the effects of the price rises, inflation, lagging behind wages and income. Women are compelled to work longer, and to make all the time higher investments, while their profits remain the same, or have not increased proportionally. During our stay the price for milk went up to Rs 13 a litre, while, for example, matchbox makers earn Rs 9.50 a day. The prices for transport went up, and this hit the Forum directly in the bus fares they have to pay for their staff. The effects of the enormous increase in prices for basic food items and the lagging behind of wages and income have deepened the poverty situation. This counts for several activities as vegetable, fruit, and fish selling more than for others.

In fact our mission member Kamila found that only the saree business in Chennai seems to flourish due to the impact of the liberalization policy of the Government. 250 garment items are being imported. She writes,

"The prices of the locally made textiles are in the downtrend and therefore the whole sale prices of these textiles are cheaper for our women. As the women stated that earlier, the price of a saree will be costing them rupees 150, which could be saleable to 200 per saree. Now the prices are 75-100, which could be saleable to 150-250 per saree, which makes the business more lucrative. More women are engaging themselves in this business at Chennai when compared to the districts rural areas due to proximity to wholesale traders who buys from textile industries directly."

In our interviews with women selling sarees we noticed that they had benefited from the new 'free market' policies. But the majority of women engaged in trading agricultural products, weaving, lace making, toy making, fisheries are affected due to higher cost prices, inflation and reduced employment opportunities. In particular the women in the coastal areas are hit by the dramatic decrease in catch during the past years (see Ilse du Pied, 2000). In chapter 4 this will be illustrated.

Moreover, the privatisation policy has plundered many women from the access to raw materials and resources. This was made clear to us in Kanchipuram, where women complained that the middlemen were not able any longer to supply the raw silk at a regular basis due to increasing competition. The result is more abject poverty among women weavers in Kanchipuram, with the consequence that many women told that they were pledged to the merchant/moneylender by their parents-in-law, or that they are forced to pledge their children to get small loans to buy food. Other women told me that they were compelled to give up their trade, as the price rise in the wholesale market was so enormous that they were unable to buy and sell. This creates a flux in which they cannot repay the loan taken, and have no reserves to invest in any other productive work. The increasing proportion of overdue/doubtful loans (see chapter 6) might be an indication that to make a living becomes almost impossible for the poorest. Postponing and re-laning are present coping mechanisms. As a result, the majority of the women we met, expressed their need for higher loans to invest in their working capital (see chapter 4).

The main cause for the increasing feminisation of poverty is also related to the seemingly increasing male alcoholism. There are indications that male alcoholism (and suicide) can be understood as escapism behaviour related to the heavy, dirty, low status labour they have to do, in combination with declining labour opportunities for the poorest men in India.
Many women we met in the credit groups are either single heads of households (deserted, divorced, widows) or in case they are married, the husbands are contributing the 'left overs' of their income, after spending on alcohol, in an irregular way. As women feel responsible to sustain the family, they expressed the need to earn an own income and to be independent of the husband in order to be able to provide the daily food for their children. The Forum encourages this view, but the question is raised if this situation does not reinforce the prevailing gender roles and ideologies, which load an enormous burden on the shoulders of poor women (see chapter 4).

The full realisation of the economic and social core facts should be the context to assess the activities of the Working Women’s Forum. The foreshadowed problems are of crucial importance for our analysis, and determine the character of our recommendations.

Three scenarios might be envisaged in view in the second half of Phase III and beyond 2001 of the Forum. The implications and options of the scenarios will be elaborated in chapter seven, on conclusions and recommendations.

2.2 COPING STRATEGIES OF THE WWF

In comparison with 1996 the increasing poverty, and feminisation of poverty, have not changed. On the contrary the situation has worsened, and it is almost sure in the coming decade it will be even worse. The Forum has not witnessed these developments in silence. It has responded in many ways to counteract the above-mentioned undermining economic forces. In that sense the past five years were a time of transformation and innovation. The mission noticed the following important changes in policies and strategies in the past five years:

- In view of the inflation rate of 8% per year the WWF has adjusted its loan amounts in the past 5 years. In 1996 the starting group loan was Rs 400, now it is Rs 600. Moreover, the speed of getting higher group loans has increased. In 1996 a loan group got two years Rs 400 before it could access the Rs 600 amount to be sure of its capacity to repay. Now the size of the loan is each year increased with Rs 200. A second year credit group gets automatically Rs 800 loan. So, it can be said that a little bit more risk is taken in Phase III in comparison with Phase II. But it also means that the amount of the rotating capital increases in a considerably way which was not foreseen at the speed and size it takes now, in 1996.

- Since 1997 the bank is also borrowing to individual women. This is a new phenomenon in the history of the organisation. Loan disbursement details for Chennai (01-07-2001) show that individual loans range from Rs 3000 up to Rs 20000. There are 31 women in Chennai who took a loan of Rs 20,000. Interviews with groups of 'heavy clients' showed that they belong mostly to the category of reliable members or leaders of the Forum for a long time. This decision means less work for the staff and more chance for high repayment rates. However, it might endanger the basic pro-poor women policy and the empowerment objectives.

- The number of groups in Chennai, and in all the other local branches expanded considerably (see next chapter). This process was simultaneously accompanied by the increase in number of organisers and area staff (see also next chapter).
• A new programme for ‘alternatives in livelihood systems’ and economic diversification was introduced for women beedi workers in Vellore and Gudiyattam in the framework of the WWF-ILO partnership program. Work options in the beedi industry are quickly shrinking as a result of ‘stop smoking’ campaigns and competition with mini cigarettes. In Vellore many women are involved in ‘beedi’ rolling, which causes serious occupational health hazards due to their exposure to tobacco dust, and long hours at work in unhygienic conditions. Women-trainees met, told that their beedi rolling mothers died at a young age of TBC. The programme has trained already 253 groups in all kind of products: soap powder making, tailoring, embroidery, jam, soft drink, incense making etc. The ILO so far financed the project but funds are depleted. Trainers from the WWF were trained at various training institutes, and impart the training for the women members. This diversification of activities seems to be successful in practice. Success stories of women in Vellore selling lots of jam and lemon-pickles were told to the mission member.

Photo 3. The participants of the ‘alternative livelihood’ programme obtaining their diplomes

Other changes during the past five years of the Forum to cope with changing conditions are:

• The reproductive health programme funded by the UNDP was stopped (1997) and integrated in the overall income generating/credit programme. Health education is incorporated in the training for the credit groups, and teaching material is produced on the issue by all local branches. Of the former health workers some could get good jobs as nurses and community health workers in government hospitals and clinics. Some others started their own midwife practice. But, the WWF planted an additional strong network of cadres in its organization by incorporating some of the former women health workers in their network. In case of demand and need the former health workers became organisers for the credit programme. The point here
is that the former health workers looked after and cared for on average 300 to 500 households in a slum. They developed strong personal relations with these households and supported them in sickness, crises, and calamities. The fact that somebody acting as a social, and health worker is now an organiser and belonging to their Sangam (organisation), contributes no doubt to the sustainability of the organisation. The earlier mentioned WWF image as 'Amma', a mother who cares for them with love will be enhanced. Conceptually, the relationship between income, women's status and family planning is emphasized in the training. Economic empowerment might contribute to make women 'boss over their own bellies'. Family planning and good health makes the mother more fit to take up economic activities.

- To strengthen the sustainability and self-reliance of the local branches more qualified professional management staff from outside has been appointed. This time the staff came not from the grass roots but was recruited by advertisements in the newspaper.

3. ORGANISATIONAL AND EMPOWERMENT ANALYSIS

In this chapter the institutional, political, social and human resource dimensions of sustainability will be analysed. However, we have to start first with a description of the existing organisational structure to understand the potential for future sustainability of these dimensions.

3.1 ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE: DIVISION OF TASKS

The Working Women's Forum is registered, since 1978, as a society under the Tamilnadu Societies Registration Act of 1975. Since 1978, 15 branches have been established over a period of 20 years. The following overview shows the years of starting of new branches and the approx. number of members in each branch around 2000 and the growth of members since 1996 (figures between brackets).

Organisation

Table 1. Overview branches, history, areas covered, number of WWF members in 1996 and 2000.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of the branch</th>
<th>Year of starting</th>
<th>Areas covered 2000</th>
<th>No. of WWF members 1996*</th>
<th>No.of WWF members 2001**</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Chennai</td>
<td>1978</td>
<td>835</td>
<td>75.436</td>
<td>102.492</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Adirampattinam</td>
<td>1981</td>
<td>268</td>
<td>42.778</td>
<td>57.659</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Dindigul</td>
<td>1980</td>
<td>607</td>
<td>38.511</td>
<td>54.213</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Vellore</td>
<td>1983</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>32.053</td>
<td>47.030</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Kancheepuram</td>
<td>1990</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>21.281</td>
<td>34.117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Dharmapuri</td>
<td>1993</td>
<td>319</td>
<td>7.426</td>
<td>15.549</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Bangalore</td>
<td>1983</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>37.675</td>
<td>46.129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Bidar</td>
<td>1987</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>23.912</td>
<td>33.303</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Hyderabad</td>
<td>1997</td>
<td>165</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>5.225</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Narsapur</td>
<td>1981</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>65.332</td>
<td>74.758</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
When we do not consider Hyderabad branch, which did not exist in 1996, we see an increase of 165.782 members (29%) in 3 to 4 years. This is an amazing quick pace of expansion of groups. Even in some areas as Dharmapuri, the number of members has doubled in five years, which is possibly the effect of the intensification of activities in this high prone female infanticide area. In Belllary membership seems to have almost tripled which might be due to the extreme gender backward (devadasi, child marriage, etc) and abject poverty character of the area.

**Division of tasks between the three organisations**

WWF has formed two specialized sister organizations: ICNW and NUWW. The following overview shows the main activities and division of tasks of each entity in the head office in Chennai. In practice the division of tasks between the three organisations is the same in each of the branches with the exception that certain tasks as resource mobilisation and independent partnership training are not carried out in the branches.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of organization</th>
<th>Working Women's Forum WWF</th>
<th>Indian Cooperative Network for Women ICNW</th>
<th>National Union of Working Women NUWW</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Activities</strong></td>
<td>• social mobilisation</td>
<td>• micro credit</td>
<td>• unionization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• training in replication</td>
<td>• fixed deposits</td>
<td>• research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• savings</td>
<td>• technology</td>
<td>• training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• acquisition resources</td>
<td>• entreprenurship</td>
<td>• awareness raising</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• support to reproductive</td>
<td></td>
<td>• micro insurance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>health services</td>
<td></td>
<td>• employment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• rehabilitation,</td>
<td></td>
<td>• legal support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>night schools</td>
<td></td>
<td>• children's homes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• marches/rallies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Character of services</strong></td>
<td>NGO SERVICES AND SOCIO POLITICAL WOMEN'S MOVEMENT</td>
<td>FINANCIAL SERVICES, CREDIT AND BANKING NETWORK</td>
<td>UNION ACTIVITIES, INFORMAL SECTOR TRADE UNION</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The three institutions have in fact clear tasks, which nurture and support each other. It is impossible to separate them. While the Forum has 15 branches in three states (Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh), there is only one Co-operative Society in each state. By virtue of becoming a member of the Forum, working women are entitled to membership in the ICNW to get credit, and to opportunities provided by the NUWW (in securing equal opportunities, better wages and other social rights). Key concept in WWF's integrated approach is, to mobilize very poor women into credit groups, to take short-term small loans.
from a revolving credit society, the Indian Co-operative Network for Women, which has been replicated and adjusted in Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh.

**Tasks and staff of bank**
The tasks of the ICNW are the most clear and demarcated. They perform the activities related to banking. They make assessments in co-operation with the organisers of potential women borrowers groups, sanction loans to groups and individuals, handle credit and saving transactions and keep administration of all the financial transactions. Their employees are executives (only 3 in Chennai), loan officers (17), accountants (17), cashiers (17) and credit assistants (69). In short they provide financial services. Each branch has in principle one loan officer, one accountant and one cashier. The number of credit assistants is more or less in proportion to the number of credit groups (for example 11 in North and South Chennai, 6 in Dindigul, 1 in Bidar and Bellary, etc). In total there are 123 ICNW staff members in 17 (Chennai has 3 sub-divisions) branches. It should be noted that with the introduction of the computer programme in Chennai the number of staff in the head office will be reduced in future.

The style of bank administration has its own logic and background. The units taken in overviews coincide with the administrative units of the Indian Government. A credit area in the rural areas entails the Gram Panchayat boundaries. In the cities it follows the official municipal administrative divisions. Overviews are also based on the official requirements of the rules and regulations of the Co-operative Acts. In the head office the final monthly debit and credit account of each branch is fed into the computer.

Besides, the usual group credit programme and individual loans, the ICNW gives technology credit and rehabilitation credits. Technology loan is a support system for poor women through access to technology. It may be a grinder for the idli sellers, a sewing machine for tailors, a wood cutting machine for timber processing women, a pulling cart / tricycle for vegetable hawkers and vendors, a sugarcane juicer for juice vendors, water aerating machines for soda sellers, etc. Rehabilitation loans are given to members of WWF, ICNW when there are crises in their lives such as outbreak fire in an urban slum, flood in the rural areas and cyclones. In the case of ICNW the loans are rescheduled with a higher loan amount and an increased instalment period.

In the visited branch Kanchipuram there are 17 organisers, 9 bank employees, 1 WWF staff, 1 Union staff and 2 trainers. Former health workers are incorporated in the staff. They work in 120 villages and 45 slums. They started in 1990, in 3 villages. They cover two districts. The bank field staff goes to the villages to do the banking. There are 9 mobile branches. They sit on the temple veranda and have no special building. The criterion to come to the village is, that if the credit group leaders have to pay more then Rs 10 with the bus, or the distance to the branch is more than 25 km or more, the bank comes to them. The routine of the bank over the month is as follows: week 1 is used for loan disbursement; week 2 is used for training of new loaners; week 3 is used for assessment of new areas and groups and week 4 is used for collection of instalments, interest, and savings.

**Tasks and staff of WWF**
The backbone of the WWF is the network of organisers (total 178). Organisers are part of the WWF and are paid by them. The WWF has administrative (55) and co-ordinating staff (10) involved in monitoring, research, partnership training, rehabilitation services in case of emergencies and social mobilisation. The donor funded formal Reproductive

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6 Data on the number of loans were not collected because of lack of time.
Health Service programme ended in 1997. However, women's reproductive role is considered as a social role by the WWF and therefore the focus shifted to the human (women's) rights issues. Apart from child survival and safe motherhood, the WWF promotes awareness in training and campaigns for complicated issues as female infanticide, child labour/child prostitution. Above all, a firm emphasis in the training is on the welfare and development of female children, a neglected resource in almost all of the developing countries. The Forum's health care efforts (health insurance)\(^7\) intend to demonstrate that the enhancement of the quality of life ultimately results in the reduction of fertility rates. WWF's health care program pursues to be a human centred approach covering a wide spectrum of women's life cycle; from birth to adolescence, reproductive age groups and even beyond reproductive stage among the older age group of women as well. That much work has to be done in this field is evident (see chapter 4).

The rehabilitation task of the WWF is more a rehabilitation service where household things will be collected and distributed. Also small grants have been disbursed from the crisis fund of the WWF. Mission members met women who got support from the WWF to pay the costs of expensive operations and deliveries through caesarean operations.

**Tasks and staff of NUWW** \(^8\)

An important activity of the NUWW is training: leadership, gender and (alternative livelihood) occupational training of the members of the neighbourhood credit groups. There are 30 trainers on the pay role of the NUWW. 44 other staff organises mass social movements for better labour conditions and - relations, access to basic services, covering of insurance schemes, advocacy for women, etc.

It should be noted that most trade unions in India, with the exception of the Communist trade unions, as for instance CITU and INTUC, are broadly organising the workers (for the far majority males) in the formal and Government sector (see Breman 2001). Therefore, it is very special that the WWF is uniting and mobilising women working in the informal sector. The trade union actions have successfully implemented wage revisions for occupational groups as beedi and agarbathi rollers and lace artisan women and fought with success against the male domination in weaver's co-operatives. It is laudable that because of the fierce struggle of the NUWW, two exclusively women weavers co-operatives in Kanchipuram have been founded. During field visits many examples of collective protest and actions were narrated against the dominating gender ideology, social caste/class injustice, hike in prices (petrol/diesel) and indifference of local-, and municipal authorities to provide basic civic amenities.

### 3.2 EMPOWERMENT: 'DIVISION OF TASKS'

\(^7\) Unfortunately we have no data on the size and impact of the health insurance scheme.

\(^8\) It should be noted that the evaluation of the work of the trade union was not covered in the TOR. No expert was appointed in the mission to look after these aspect. The NUWW is tacitly considered as part of the WWF and associated with training. But, the trade union is doing much more (all the insurance schemes, labour right issues, etc). Therefore, there might be an underexposure in this report of the role and achievements of the NUWW.
Dutch development co-operation regarding Women and Development is based on the autonomy concept. When we consider the four basic components of autonomy, which broadly can be considered as a synonym for empowerment, namely: the economic, socio-cultural, physical and political component, the Forum has achieved much to realise each of them in practice. In the following, the 'division of tasks' regarding the components of empowerment among the three organisations is sketched.

The economic part of empowerment is, that the organisation pursues in the first place to mitigate poverty, hunger, starvation, and indebtedness by strengthening the productive roles of women. This task is broadly carried out by the ICNW. Low cost and easy access to credit can be considered at first view as a practical need for poor women. Although, credit as such does not guarantee economic empowerment, which implies equal access to and control over the means of production, it is the necessary jumping-board to the level of empowerment in terms of strategic interests, needs and rights of women.

Tools for the socio-cultural component of the empowerment process are the leadership training and many other awareness raising encounters, which intend to boost the level of self-respect, self-confidence, the right to one's own independent identity, and feelings of being 'worthwhile' as a women worker. The perspective of the Forum is that women's subordination is a holistic process encompassing all aspects of women's lives, including their families, their work, legislation and state structures. Gender training is therefore necessary to recognise the ideology that legitimises male domination and to understand how it perpetuates the oppression of women. Therefore women have to organise themselves, raise their consciousness, develop a political voice, and design their own development. A bottom-up approach is considered the best way to reach empowerment. This very difficult part of the empowerment process rests mainly on the shoulders of the NUWW. They pursue to enhance the gender-, class-, caste- and political awareness of the women, in order to generate the energy and strength to cope with, and to struggle against, the multitude of problems poor women face.

The reproductive health programme in the Forum relates to the physical aspect of empowerment, which aims full control over one's own sexuality and fertility. The WWF supports the reproductive role of women and pursues to make women aware on the right of 'being boss in their own belly'.

The creation of an autonomous women's organisation what the WWF entails is in fact the creation of a power base in a self determined direction, independent of any political party and its (mostly male dominant) ideology. This is the political dimension of empowerment and so to say, to use some metaphors, 'the cradle' in which the

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9 See speech Netherlands Minister for Development Co-operation, Jan Pronk, 13 June, 1991.
10 Caroline Moser (1989) has developed the concepts of 'practical' and 'strategic' gender needs/interests. Practical gender needs are needs which are formulated from the concrete conditions women experience. They come from concrete needs for human survival but usually reinforce the gender division of labour. Women have more practical gender needs relating to their productive and reproductive work as being able to provide food and water, fuel, wood, health care and education for the family. Strategic gender needs and interests are those needs women identify because of their subordinate position to men in their society. When met they will actually help to create greater gender equality. Strategic gender interests of women include: removal of gender discrimination, landrights for women, participation in male dominated political decision m(t)aking organisations, etc.
empowerment ‘baby’ can grow. Every time again, which each new group that is initiated in the Forum’s approach, this cradle is necessary as a nursery, which will raise grown-up empowered women. Women with a strong social identity of belonging to an organisation which is perceived as their ‘own’; as their own ‘foster family’. Ownership perceptions bloom when access and control over an organisation is in the hands of the people involved. Work style, principles, rituals and symbols\textsuperscript{11} give the women a group identity, which holds the various components together and is crucial for the cohesion and inherent sustainability of the organisation in all its dimensions.

Organisation and mobilisation on the one hand, and training, transforming consciousness and awareness raising on the other, can be seen as the WWF’s ‘transformatory’ potential that may lead to the fulfilment of some strategic gender needs. Finally this may lead to empowerment: both to empowerment as an end, and to empowerment as a process. While credit is the incentive and entry-point that initially motivates women to form themselves into groups, the regular and supportive group meetings may facilitate the capacity of women members to participate actively in the organisation. Leadership should come from the membership itself, the so-called bottom-up approach; the priorities of the poor women, and only poor women that comes first; and the members which are not treated as ‘beneficiaries’ or the ‘target-group’, but rather are the participants, the members, the organisers and the people that determine the priorities and the decisions taken. This ideological position of the Forum and the organisational structure, mentioned previously, may be considered the important conditions for stimulation the process of empowerment.

3.3 ORGANISATION AND ROLES OF OFFICE BEARERS

Each of the three bodies, although they have the same group of women as members, has their own set of rules, governing councils, and executive committees. The Co-operative Societies, for example, are governed according to the Co-operative Act of their respective states.

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<tr>
<th>WWF</th>
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<td>President</td>
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<td>Vice - president (2)</td>
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<td>Treasurer (1)</td>
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The president of the Forum provides a vital co-ordination link by also being President of the Union and the Co-operative Society. The President provides overall support to the entire organization, looks after general administration, and is responsible for mobilizing funds, preparing project proposals, negotiating with various government bodies, plus

\textsuperscript{11} In every branch office the same standard photo's highlight important events in the life of the President
representing the Forum in various national and international forums. She keeps close contact and communicates with members, leaders, organisers, staff and office bearers in all branches. During the mission time she went to Bellary to be present at the large annual Governing Body meeting. Moreover she accompanied us to visit several women’s groups. The two Vice-Presidents of the Forum and the vice-president of the Indian Co-operative Network for Women take care of general administration in their respective bodies; discuss programmes, problems and future plan of action in the governing body meetings; liaise and work closely with the organisers; settle disputes within their jurisdiction; visit the branches regularly; and decide on the course of action in the absence of the president on routine issues or minor problems.

The Board of Directors of the ICNW makes key decisions, with the President on various aspects of the organization, oversees activities in all the branches, and helps solve problems in the branches. The representation of the head office vis-à-vis the branches on the Board of Directors of the ICNW is four members from the head office and six from the branches which shows the important voice in decision making by the branches.

The Secretary of the WWF, who is also the secretary of the National Union of Working Women, provides overall supervision and support to the work of all the branches in three states. Her major functions are to help organisers and group leaders mobilize and organize women; recruit and train women members as leaders and organisers; report to the president on various aspects of the organization. Based on guidelines provided by the organisers and the vice-presidents, she decides the amount of loans to be disbursed, the number of loan groups to be organized, and the future course of action to be taken.

The Treasurer, of the ICNW plays the same vital role as the Secretary of the Forum. The job responsibilities of the treasurer include visiting new areas and taking decisions on loan disbursements; participating in discussions of the governing body; solving problems in branches during periodic visits; and signing forms, cheques, vouchers and cash books.

The administrative staff of the Forum and the Society includes loan officers, co-ordinators, project officers, branch in-charges, and clerks, who co-ordinate and supervise the activities within the office and liaise with external agencies. The field staff looks after the bank affairs, non-formal education and childcare centres.

The bottom-up approach of the Forum is shown in the important fact that the organisers comprise the Governing Body of the WWF, which elects the President, Vice-President and the Secretary.

3.4. ORGANISATION OF BRANCHES, AND OF CREDIT PROGRAMME

In every branch, the staff starts early morning in the WWF branch offices to do their daily work. In each office is a bank counter of the ICNW and organisers, the leaders/members of groups walk in and out of the office to repay their loans, bring their savings, or other purposes. Groups of women arrive for their pre-loan training. It is a vivid coming and going.

The following overview gives the types of staff that are in principle present in each of the branch offices:
It is envisaged by the Forum that in future the branch WWF and NUWW staff will be paid out of the 10% of the interest the women in the credit groups pay out of the total 18%. This 10% is now transferred to the WWF in the head office (from the Dutch grant), but will remain in future (after 2004?) in the branches. The other 8% is already remaining in the branches to cover the salary and other costs of the ICNW.

Organisational structure of the forum in the branches: Branch Co-ordinators and Organisers

The administrative staff (55 total in all the branches) is of course very important but more crucial is the role of the branch co-ordinator. The role of the branch co-ordinator is more than an overall co-ordinating role of the activities, and daily supervision of organisers, trainers, and other staff in their work. The branch co-ordinator should have very good social skills and inspire and motivate the other branch workers in the spirit of the Forum. In branches visited the mission noticed that two types of co-ordinators could be met: the ones who have come up from within the Forum and the 'new' type of recruited from outside. In paragraph 3.6 we will give more details.

The organisers and the area leaders are the vital link between the forum and the credit groups. As detailed information on organisers will be presented in chapter 4 we will here only sketch the main tasks and role they fulfil in daily practice.

Most organisers are former group leaders. Judged on their commitment to WWF's activities, communication skills, ability to reach people, and/or leadership qualities, they are promoted to the position of paid organisers. A few organisers did not join initially as members or leaders. But because of the Forum's commitment to help women who have been deserted or widowed, they have been accommodated and accepted in the organization. Although a few may not have prior working experience, they gain acceptance and solidarity because of their plight as single women.

Madras

Saraswati is the organiser of a new group, has 3 other groups waiting in this area. She earns Rs 550 monthly as an organiser from the Forum and can reclalm transport costs. In the morning she has her own idli shop. She earns Rs 70 a day, put Rs 30 apart for the next day and eats Rs 40 with her family. She got married at 16 years and is now 34. 3 days a week she goes to the Forum. She was 4 years member and 8 years leader, than became organiser. She bought a grinder from the savings. She rises at 5 o'clock and does the idli shop work till 9. Then she goes to the Forum till 5. Goes home and prepare for the next day. Sleep at 11 (only six hours sleep). Her husband is very helpful. Cuts tomato and onions and brings children to school. Before she knew the Forum her husband did not allow her to come out of the house. Now he helps. 'I know what is poverty all about.' She brings other groups to this group who have to start a group to learn from them.

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12 It should be realised that the costs for the salaries of the organisers and trainers take a moderate part of the total budget. Travel costs involved in mobilisation of neighbourhood groups and per diem payments to women following training as a compensation for their days of loss of work and travel costs require also reservation of funds.
Organisers are also councillors for women to suggest activities they can start. We came across women, who had no productive activity before they joined the Forum but could start a trade after receiving the first loan. This shows that not only the somewhat better off are supported by the credit programme, but also very poor women surviving before by wage labour. In Kanchipuram we met several women who were agricultural labourers but are now self-employed weavers. (More on organisers in Chapter 4)

**Organisation of the credit groups**

Credit groups consist on average of 8 to 15 women, including a leader. The whole process of identification and formation of credit groups, distribution of the loan and repayment is as follows. It is mostly the organiser who advises a certain alert woman in a poor area to become a leader and to form a credit group. The leader approaches certain working/self-employed women in her neighbourhood if they want to join. The selection is at first hand based on poverty level (widows, deserted women, married women with drunken husbands), exploitation by money lenders/middlemen, and involvement in a business; trust in the person to take re-payment serious and liking. The leader knows that she will be the first one who is responsible for the advancement of re-payment in case the members are unable to do that. After the initial formation of the group by the leader with the support of the organiser, the organiser, area leader and the field staff of the bank assess the financial situation of each member. They look in particular whether the potential group members are involved in some productive activity, or have some clear thoughts on what activity to start; the motivation to improve their condition, their reliable reputation, etc. Mrs Kamila noticed that an organizer stated, that ownership of a house is also a criterion as most of them are migrant labourers. When the question was raised, whether this might mean that they end up in selecting rich women, then the criteria mentioned was that they want at least the leader to have her own house as a collateral in case of failing repayments.

The usual routine of the credit groups in general seems to be, that around the 15th of the month the members bring the repayment and interest to the leader. The 20th the leader, or a member, brings the total amount to the ICNW bank. However, for the first loan all members have to come to the bank to pay their membership fee and to receive their passbook for the saving fund. Women pay Rs 12/- to the Forum and Rs 12/- to the Trade Union and additional Rs 2/- to the Cooperative.

As mentioned in the above, the WWF has adjusted its loan amounts in the past 5 years. In 1996 the starting group loan was Rs 400, now it is Rs 600. Moreover, the speed of getting higher group loans has increased. In 1996 a loan group got two years Rs 400 before it could access the Rs 600 amount to be sure of its capacity to repay. Now the size of the loan is each year increased with Rs 200. A second year credit group gets automatically Rs 800 loan.

All members of credit groups are shareholders of the Cooperative. That means that on each Rs 200/- loan Rs 20/- share is deposited in the bank. At each re-loaning the amount of shares increases and is in total 10% of the total loan taken. In case a woman decides to stop taking loans, her shares will be repaid. This means that the women as shareholders are involved in a form of long term saving over a long period of time.

However, the WWF has also a saving scheme. During the one-day training the women are informed on the meaning of savings and the procedures to be followed. Each member gets a Passbook with a photo and an account in the Cooperative bank is opened for each member of a credit group. It is very difficult for women who just survive at the subsistence level to save money. In some branches the savings are connected with participation in the Life Insurance Company (LIC). Women pay Rs 25/- per year to the LIC.
In case they die their children (priority to the daughter) will get Rs 5000/-. In the slums of Chennai we met a woman who took the Insurance in the name of their old mother. This gives emotional rest to be sure that the old mother will have a decent funeral.

As resources are scarce, the perspective of the WWF and the ICNW was in 1996, that it is better to distribute small loans to many women than to distributed higher loans to fewer women. However, since 1997 the bank is also borrowing to individual women ‘heavy’ loans. This is a new phenomenon in the history of the organisation in line with the time spirit. Loan disbursement details for Chennai (01-07-2001) show that individual loans range from Rs 3000 up to Rs 20000. There are 31 women in Chennai who took a loan of Rs 20,000. Interviews with groups of ‘heavy clients’ showed that they mostly have been reliable members or leaders with the Forum for a long time. They (husbands are also involved) invest in cycle shops, TV repair, textile selling, petrol selling, etc.

There is no time limit for the number of re-loans. Three credit groups in South and Central Chennai have obtained loans for 20 subsequent years.

**Leaders of the credit group**

The success or failure of the “neighbourhood groups” (only in very rare cases we came across kinship relations, mother-daughter, the daughter of the leader had taken over the leadership of her mother after ‘retirement’ of the mother as a group leader) depends very much on the leadership ability and communication skill of the group leader. They are usually from the same class as their respective group members but already in the first years group it is visible (housing condition, dress) that they are in a better socio-economic condition as the other group members.

The leader selects the members of the group. Sometimes this is based on former employment relations, e.g. a group for agricultural wageworkers. But, a leader confessed that liking and attachment to women who have gone through the same sufferings as she are also crucial aspects. Other leaders mentioned that they know each other from the market, religious meetings, marriages in the neighbourhood etc. She identifies the loan needs of her group, processes the applications, and monitors repayment. She acts as a loan guarantor and spokeswoman for the group. The leaders operate on a voluntary basis but receive as an incentive, larger loans than their respective group members. Each leader attends periodic co-ordinating meetings convened by the organisers and meets regularly with the group members. Also group leaders act as a mother for the other members. One young woman told that the group leader had rescued her from an effort to commit suicide.

**3.5 POLICY, PLANNING, DECISION MAKING, ACCOUNTABILITY**

In the following an analyses is made to get some replies on the extent of self-reliance and autonomy of the local branches regarding management sustainability of policy, planning, decision-making and accountability. Therefore, the mission looked into the current situation and analysed these components.

**Policy regarding management aspects**
At the moment the general policy\textsuperscript{13} in the branches visited is broadly the same. This is a logic result of the historical replication approach followed, to start and to develop new branches. It was the policy of the WWF that women with long years experience in a certain branch will be posted in a new branch to transfer their experience to the staff in the new branch.\textsuperscript{14} This is also deliberately done to prevent favouritism of local staff to certain groups in the area and to resist political pressure to include certain dominant (elite) groups in the credit programme. This can be called one of the checks and balances in the organisation.

However, we have to remark immediately that according to the needs of the local branch adjustments on general policy issues are possible. For example, the starters loan for first year groups in Kanchipuram is not as everywhere else Rs 600, but Rs 1000. As weaving requires more investment. The example of the special alternative livelihood programme for beedi workers carried out in Vellore shows that certainly a policy is followed with consideration of the specific occupational character of branches. This means that management policies are not rigidly applied in each branch. For example the new policy to give 'heavy loans' to individual women, let us say from 5200 to 20.000 Rs is not followed, e.g. in Dharampuri, as obviously there, to give more women small loans has priority (very poor female infanticide area).

This shows that there is already a certain autonomy and flexibility in applying of general policies in the branches according to their specific socio-economic, cultural and occupational character.

The finding is, that in the branches visited, the policy of the WWF is understood, known and what is more important accepted and implemented with full endorsement and success. There is no reason to assume that the branches have insufficient capacity to carry on with the WWF prevalent policy in future.

**Decentralised decision-making, self reliance of branches**

Decision making in branches is to a large extent based on local autonomy, certainly when it comes to daily practice. The basic principles of the bottom-up approach and grass roots development promote decentralisation of decision-making. In the daily functioning of the branches, the head office plays an advisory and monitoring role.

The branches take the entire responsibility of forming neighbourhood credit groups and assessing their credit requirements. The final sanction of the loans for potential client groups is decided in each branch itself and the head office is informed monthly. Based on previous records of good recovery, loans are sanctioned monthly in which the head office has no role to play. The monthly profiles on credit, savings and training are sent to the Chennai office and fed in the computer. Regarding daily decisions on planning, allotment of funds and expenditure, and implementation of transactions the branches are fully

\textsuperscript{13} With policy we refer to the basic concepts in the WWF as support to poor women, organisers should come from the grassroots, indicators for group formation, etc but with policy we can also think of all the rules and regulations and procedures followed in the process of the credit lending.

\textsuperscript{14} The personal circumstances are well looked at in case of transfer of staff members. The evaluation team found that marriage with a man from the place of the new branches is one of the reasons for posting.
independent. Regarding appointment of staff, recruitment takes place both at the local level and via deputation/and transfers. At the local level the branches are independent in their appointment of local staff. In case of deputation the main office advises. Appointed staff is relying on the head office only for their training needs.

**Planning**

In December of each year a large annual meeting is organised in each branch, with representatives from the Chennai Office (president and secretary of the ICNW) in which the financial statements and problems of the branches over the past year are discussed and the planning is made for the coming year. The allotment of funds is based and adjusted to local condition. Loans for the silk weavers are larger and therefore the amount for the provision of rotating credit is higher. Surpluses of successful branches are used to assist branches with a shortage. In cases of new branches (Hyderabad 1997), the head office had more responsibility to secure funds and provide them with adequate financial and staff resources.

At the moment the allotment of funds in the the annual December meeting follows the project description and budget as stated in the Phase III proposal sanctioned by the Dutch Government. The budgetary provisions for each branch for the revolving fund for credit operations and other costs are distributed according to the earmarked components. A six-monthly disbursement is made to the branches as an administrative fund, which covers salaries and maintenance expenses. Upon receiving these funds, the branches plan their day-to-day activities.

The planning is also based on the expansion rate of each branch. Annually the WWF is growing with many new members (see above). Only in Chennai approx 35 new credit groups over the period January 2001 to June 2001 are identified, formed and trained. In Adirampattinam 1588 new members have joined the Forum in the same time span. For other local branches the same trend can be identified. The demand is enormous. It can be imagined that the planning of the re-loaning and the provision of loans for new members is an enormous planning task. However, the mission found that the whole planning process from identification to loaning/repayment transactions runs extremely well, and that an amazing skill and capability has been developed to handle the massive amount of work, including the planning of training prior to each new loaning. The field staff without any sophisticated technology carries out this all. In the local branches visited there was no computer.

**Accountability**

At the annual meeting in December financial overviews and justification of costs, interest and shareholder income, etc. are discussed in a plenary meeting with the (staff) members of the branches and the office bearers and other staff of the main office. This contributes to the transparency and accountability of local transactions. It will be good, even in case of acquired financial sustainability, that the current institutional accountability arrangements might be continued.

As the co-operative units are registered as legal entities, the Government auditors audit the entire system annually in each state of operations.

A form of accountability at the WWF level to the 'outside world' is their dissemination of Annual Reports, information material as books, video's, brochures, PowerPoint presentations (also printed), which give a detailed overview of membership, loan
distribution, leadership training, coverage of new areas, training, workshops, visitors etc. Moreover, research is carried out on the impact of the credit programme.

**Conclusion:** In terms of policy, decision-making, planning and accountability the local branches are almost self-reliant in management due to the fact that the field staff knows exactly their tasks and responsibilities and carries out the work with a high commitment and motivation.

However, it should be cautioned that when in future branches might not be able to expand the number of groups and other activities because of lack of local funds, the danger will increase that they are forced to shift to less pro-poor decisions, as e.g. to give bigger loans to individual women, as that will mean less work and more chance for good return rates. Or, even they might be compelled to increase the interest rates, which will be disastrous for both parties. All these options will be a serious loss of the ideological sustainability that has been achieved over the years.

3.6 LEADERSHIP, COMMUNICATION, CHECKS AND BALANCES.

**Leadership**
As is shown in the previous the success and strength of the WWF is based on the unusual wisdom that leadership should come from the membership itself. The Forum is very successful in integrating poor women at all levels in the institutional and organisational framework, which highly benefits the delivery system to reach a large numbers of poor women. Local leadership can be traced at every level of the stakeholder groups involved in the activities of the Forum. The Forum is building up leadership capacity for self-respect and self-development, and earning an income (credit group women, leaders and organisers).

The leadership that comes from the membership itself gives the branches of the Forum a very high intrinsic social, human resource and leadership carrying capacity, which is the cement for self-reliance and autonomy.

The mission found that in the head office and visited branches the staff had outspoken leadership qualities in terms of managerial and ideological qualities. Their social and gender commitment and capacities in the head office in Chennai and the branches are impressive.

How far the leadership of the head office staff and the president of the Forum can be replaced by the branch co-ordinators will be discussed in the next paragraph 3.7.

**Communication and WWF Identity**
Frequent interaction and communication through meetings, visits, mail, phone calls with the head office allow each branch to feel it belongs to a larger single organization. It is the opinion of the mission that this interaction and communication is very important for the staff and in particular for the organisers and trainers to re-enforce the shared feeling of belonging to the WWF. They get their status, self-confidence, proud and respect because they are working for the Forum. It gives them (and in some cases their husbands also) a WWF identity, which is based on the commitment to help and to care for other poor women. Communication with the head office to boost their spirits is therefore of utmost
importance which should not be endangered in future. Autonomy of the branches might mean a loss of precious cohesion.

It is observed that the infrastructure for communication in the branches is available and in running condition. Regular (mobi-) telephone, and sometimes fax contact is maintained between the branches and the head office.

Communication in the field between branch staff and members is facilitated by the cars and drivers each branch and the head office possess (or rent). Cars and drivers facilitate communication also in the sense that they offer women staff and members security and protection to bring them home (to the station) when they have to attend late evening meetings. Visits by the bank field staff and area leaders to remote villages at a distance more than 20 kilometres contribute to frequent communication. The banks as a nodal point in the branches attract many credit group leaders and members, which enables communication at the WWF local branches. Annual planning meetings, ‘teaching material’ workshops, are occasions where internal communication takes place.

Checks and balances
In practice many representatives of the three organisations visit the members in the field. This in itself creates a check to avoid favouritism of one group above the other. Disadvantaged (potential) members can approach easily other representatives to complain. Moreover, the branch offices are very ‘client-friendly’ and open. Everybody with a request or grief has access to the office and an opportunity to talk with a staff member (co-ordinator). The Forum also seems to have a ‘mail-box’ where complaints and objections can be dropped.

Local checks and balances work as follows: When payment is delayed by 15 days, the bank staff alerts the field level organisers in their weekly meetings who will follow up with the group leader and members. This communication system seems to be effective as it brings down the default rate.

On the question of financial discipline by the branches, the head office plays a vital check and balance role. The members of the research and monitoring unit at the head office of Chennai make regular visits to branch offices to investigate (if needed) the background and reasons for delay in paying back loans. They give advice to the local bank branch in dealing with this kind of problems.

The President, the research team, and other staff visit branches with a frequency of minimum two times a year to discuss the problems and to assess the local branch performance (see above).

3.7 STAFF CAPACITY, COMPETENCE, DEVELOPMENT

WWF field staff
It is the observation of the mission that the field staff: organisers, area leaders and trainers are very competent in social mobilisation, formation and organisation of groups. They are all trained by their own life experience and knowledge of other women’s conditions. The reality of poverty and all related misery gives a day-to-day training for the organisers and health workers of the Forum. A trainer/organiser who has gone herself through the cruelties of superstition and male violence is the best teacher to explain these aspects to
new Forum members. A trainer can only be a good trainer by having self-confidence on the subjects she is talking. This self-confidence comes from personal practice. Moreover, the field staff has plenty opportunities to exchange experience and communicate during many meetings. There is no doubt that the existing solid network of group leaders, organisers and trainers will continue with their tasks in a competent way. The inherent mechanism based on commitment and solidarity with other poor women brings forward new leaders, organisers and area staff.

However, the weak point in the competence of this group is their knowledge and awareness of efficient and adequate occupational skills and economics. (See chapter 4) The time spirit of globalisation and privatisation generated economic dynamics, which require new, and specific economic and market analysis. Training and updating of skills in these domains will be a must and require extra funds in future.

The network of organisers has been strengthened by integrating several health workers from the reproductive health programme funded by the UNDP, which was stopped (1997) in the income generating/credit programme. Health education is incorporated in the training for the credit groups, and teaching material is produced on the issue by all local branches. Conceptually, the relationship between income, women's status and family planning is emphasized in the training.

Most co-ordinators at the branches have gone through an upward mobility pattern in their carrier through the channels in the Forum itself. The women met of this category are of an outstanding quality in terms of integrity, wisdom, ideology, communication skills, etc. But modern times require computer and language skills (English), negotiations with Government authorities and powerful politicians, knowledge and understanding of debates and issues at the national and international level of what is going on in the field of gender, development, banking, economic policies, etc. May be that insight has urged the Forum to appoint some 'new style' co-ordinators from outside via recruitment in newspapers. In addition to the already existing strong leadership capacities of the 'WWF raised' co-ordinators it is expected that the new staff will bring new ideas.

However, to what extent branch co-ordinators and other staff can replace the role of the head office and in particular the president and secretary? Will they, with the support of other staff members, be able to fulfil the same role, and to attain the same status, prestige and authority? Will they be able to lobby for funds, negotiate with authorities, to represent the Forum in international platforms? For the time being the answer is 'no'. A strong leader as the president, in particular in the Indian context, is an absolute necessity. As said before, the delicate matter of the possible resigning of the president in a few years and the issue of succession cannot be ignored. The efforts to move the branches in the right direction of self-reliance by the Forum can be seen as a tacit prelude to strengthen the WWF in an optimal way to be ready for the future. The Forum has raised potential leadership. It will be speculation to anticipate more on this issue.

The leadership of the head office, and in particular the leadership of the president and secretary of the bank, and the provision of expert knowledge in specialised subjects (reproductive health, trade-union work, alternative livelihoods, fund raising, research/monitoring, advocacy etc) will be necessary for all the 15 branches.

This means that the relation head-office and branch office is a crucial one. It is not a hierarchical relation based on power and authority of the centre. It is more a division of
tasks, fulfilling of complementary tasks and roles and ideological caring and nurturing. The psychological fact that part of the main office is dependent on the interest paid by the women credit groups in the local branches, gives a solid bottom-up grounding for the relation. The 'periphery' is not dependent on the 'centre' which is the usual power relation in a 'top-down' model, but in the WWF the 'centre' is as much dependent on the 'periphery'. This will change in case of financial sustainability, but as that chance will not be realistic in the near future, we will not anticipate on it here. More investigation is necessary to foresee the full implications.

Bank staff
Bank staff with a so-called qualification of SSLC +2 and training runs the banks in 'Cooperative management'. It is a policy to give the educated daughters of field staff priority in case of vacancies. The bank staff is trained in cooperative organisation. Many girls have followed a course and obtained their diploma. The administration of all bank transactions is handwritten in enormous ledgers and various registers and account books. The competence of the skills and crafts of the bank staff will be described in chapter 6 of the financial expert of the mission.

Trainers and Trade union staff
The following table shows the differences in number of appointed staff between 1996 and 2001.

Table 2: Overview change in number of staff 1996 and 2001

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Branches</th>
<th>WWF Staff</th>
<th>Organisers</th>
<th>NUWW trainers</th>
<th>NUWW other staff</th>
<th>ICNW staff</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Madras</td>
<td>(20) 16As and 4 Cs</td>
<td>(26) 35</td>
<td>(3) 9</td>
<td>(7) 7</td>
<td>(14) 39</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TN: Adirampattinam</td>
<td>(3) 3 As and 1 Cs</td>
<td>(14) 14</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>(1) 4</td>
<td>(5) 8</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TN: Dindigul</td>
<td>(2) 2 Sa and 1 Cs</td>
<td>(11) 17</td>
<td>(1) 3</td>
<td>(1) 4</td>
<td>(6) 9</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TN: Vellore</td>
<td>(2) 2 As and 1 Cs</td>
<td>(19) 15</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>(1) 4</td>
<td>(6) 5</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TN: Kanchipuram</td>
<td>(2) 2 As</td>
<td>(17) 15</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>(1) 4</td>
<td>(6) 9</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TN: Dharmapuri</td>
<td>(3) 3 As</td>
<td>(3) 10</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>(2) 5</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AP: Narsapur</td>
<td>(4) 4 As</td>
<td>(14) 9</td>
<td>(1) 1</td>
<td>(1) 3</td>
<td>(12) 8</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AP: Malkipuram</td>
<td>(3) 3 As</td>
<td>(5) 6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>(1) 1</td>
<td>(6) 5</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AP: Bhimavaram</td>
<td>(1) 4 As and 1 Cs</td>
<td>(5) 8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>(1) 1</td>
<td>(3) 6</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AP: Palakol</td>
<td>(3) 4 As</td>
<td>(6) 7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>(1) 1</td>
<td>(9) 4</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K: Bangalore</td>
<td>(3) 2 As and 1 Cs</td>
<td>(16) 10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>(1) 2</td>
<td>(3) 4</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K: Chennapatna</td>
<td>(3) 3 As</td>
<td>(6) 8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>(1) 2</td>
<td>(3) 4</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AP: Hyderabad</td>
<td>2 As and 1 Cs</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The table shows that in the past five years the total number of staff in the three organisations has increased from 310 to 440 members. What is very clear is that the number of trainers, incorporated in the NUWW, has increased from 5 to 30, and the number of other Union Staff has gone up from 18 to 44. The Union provides training to the various levels of staff and members of WWF and the ICNW. This training is provided by a team of trainers at the headquarters at Chennai and the organisers/trainers in the various branches. The trainers met explained the visuals used for the leadership training very well and with much commitment and compassion. Almost all had a long experience in the Forum as leader, organiser. There is other staff posted to look after the work of the Union at the branch level.

According to the mission, trainers and the Union staff needs strengthening in the future as labour relations and labour conditions of WWF members need much improvement (silk weavers, street vendors, match box makers). \(^{15}\)

\(^{15}\) On content and types of training see chapter 5.
The immense action work and training that is envisaged in the future will become clear by the following description of prevailing labour conditions in Kanchipuram branch. The data has been collected by Sri Vydhia, co-ordinator at the head office in Chennai for her study proposal on 'the situation of debt-bondage among the Women Silk Weavers of Kanchipuram town in Tamil Nadu State of India'.

The Kanchipuram weaving industry profile shows three tiers of weaving first ‘own account’ weavers directly selling in the market. Secondly weavers affiliated to the Government managed weavers’ Co-operatives. Both of the above categories constitute about 13% of the total Saree production. Thirdly, those weaving for the private merchants and shopkeepers, which constitute about 87% of the total saree production. This unorganised arena involves less capital investment, low levels of technology and as rule low-income returns. Therefore despite working for long arduous hours, all days a week women weavers and their families are living in deep-rooted poverty in this ancient town of Kanchipuram. The unregulated labour environment in terms of disparity in wages, exploitative terms of wage payment and precarious employment conditions intensifies poverty and powerlessness in the lives of the women in this town.

Evidently man in the family having exclusive access to raw material supply and wages for finished products denies the much needed financial resources to the family spending most of the hard earned money in alcohol and other consumptive personal needs. More so the raw materials including the ‘Golden Jari’ are pledged for his needs and spent away. Out of the need to meet the deadline of supplying finished products or otherwise lose future work, the women in these weavers household offer their children as ‘Human Collateral’ and borrow money to redeem the pledged silk to resume work and meet the deadline. Furthermore, working as wage labourers in others weaving units and borrowing for daily consumption needs as hand loans indebts the entire family to the affluent weavers/suppliers in the neighbourhood, manifesting in situations of human bondage. Accumulated debt too large to pay back, the entire family remains in bondage. They work for years in the looms for abominably low wages (i.e.) Rs. 3 per day (0.06 US Cents) or Rs.50/ per month (1.1 US cents) for children and Rs. 150/ per month (30 US $) for adults. Many of these women and their families remain in debt bondage for having borrowed for daily consumptive needs, emergencies (sickness, death, ceremonies), marriage, delivery etc and work for years in dark, damp, poorly ventilated huts in primitive living / working conditions and are unable to pay back their debt. They are subjected to exploitation by the employers, merchants and the other affluent weavers and suppliers in the neighbourhood. Children particularly the girl children are compelled to do household chores of the employers as well, apart from sitting in the weaving units and working for more than 12-15 hours a day. Sexual abuse is also rampant and women remain powerless in these situations. According to local estimates of the Working Women’s Forum about 20,000 women and their families and 14,000 children are exploited in situations of debt bondage. There is therefore an alarming need to further probe into the prevalent situation in Kanchipuram.

The trade union of the Forum has struggled a long time against male dominance in the silk weaving co-operations. They were able to initiate two women-weaver co-operatives.

It was found that in branches as Vellore unacceptable labour conditions are still rampant and that a tough labour struggle will be required to improve the situation.

**Conclusion:** Co-ordinators, Organisers, trainers and Union staff have to be expanded in numbers and strengthened in their economic knowledge, options for livelihood systems, action methodology, and leadership. This will not be possible within the realm of the

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7 Source: Statistics provided by the Additional Director Handlooms, Kanchipuram, Government of Tamil Nadu.
financial sustainability based on consolidation of the existing situation. It seems self-evident that outside financial support has to be acquired to continue the safeguarding of the basic human rights of poor women working in the informal sector.

3.8 GENDER RELATIONS WITHIN THE ORGANISATION

The WWF has a strong feminist ideology within the organisation to keep men out of every programme. It is based on their experience that when men are allowed in the management, they will immediately take over. This experience is not coming out of the blue, and firmly rooted in the socio-cultural context.

The fact that the WWF is an organisation for only poor women might contribute to the view that they follow a Women in Development (WID) approach. In Women Studies the following theoretical concepts are developed:

WID approaches focus on the practical needs of women and not on the relationship between women and men. WID approaches have no clear intention to change the subordination of women. Empowerment approach demands a focus on gender relations and implies a feminist view to tackle the strategic gender needs, interests and rights of women. A change of the behaviour of men towards women is a basic pre-condition.

Does that mean that in practice the Forum is by definition not empowering poor women?

In the WWF's opinion, they start from the women's perspective and experiences instead of from men's. Therefore, women have to determine their lives, including their relationship with others (see above). It should be indicated that in many emancipation movements subordinated and discriminated groups have isolated themselves in the first stage to build up their own identity, culture and visions for the future.16 It is in the next stages of emancipation that solidarity and co-operation with supportive groups is sought.

Why the Forum is not giving loans to poor men has been explained in detail in the report of 1996. In Chapter 4 the gender subject will be elaborated.

The drivers in the head quarter and local branches are men. We might suggest to appoint women drivers in the Chennai cars and auto-rickshaws of the WWF, to show the public alternative role models of division of labour. However, knowing the history of the drivers and their 30 years of dedicated service to the Forum, this is for the time being not advised.

There are 6 male and 3 female computer specialists in Chennai. A talk with male computer specialists revealed that they support the 'objectives of the WWF to assist poor women'. They do not notice any trace of gender isolation or special treatment in their daily practice. Their salaries are low ('but we are single' and 'we want to give service to the women') and they don't have health insurance and pension scheme. The auditor seems to be a man.

The Forum is recommended to provide health insurance and pension scheme for all employees, including the men working in their office.

16 In the Netherlands, the 'only' women's restaurants, book-shops, even walking lanes, and 'positive action' policies are normal and part of the emancipation tools.
The perception on gender relations 'outside' the organisation and in the related training will be discussed in chapter 4 and 5.

3.9 SUSTAINABILITY AND THE FUTURE

In this chapter we have indicated that regarding the organisational, managerial, social, human resource dimensions the branches have a high intrinsic carrying capacity.

As we have seen in paragraph 1.2 financial sustainability is according to the WWF possible under the condition of consolidation of activities and 'static' membership and rotating credit. However, this is not an realistic option as globalisation and marginalisation of poor women will require a constant expansion of competent and motivated staff (trainers, organisers, area staff), and in particular more professional trade union staff will be absolutely necessary.

This situation makes the question, if total autonomy for each branch is 'desirable' already superfluous. But, even if branches might become financially self-reliant, the mission would consider it as undesirable to pursue full autonomy of the branches for the following reasons:

- it will decrease the strong cohesion, and perception of social identity of the branches and its members;
- it will weaken collective actions and solidarity with weaker branches;
- it will decrease the level of sharing experience and problem solving;
- skills, capacity, expertise and authority to take over tasks and roles of the head office in Chennai are, for the time being, not available and adequate at the local branches;
- it will be impossible to recruit at each branch specialised staff, or to hire consultants, in marketing, trade union work, reproductive health, etc;
- it might endanger and decrease the level of empowerment, as branches might be forced because of shortage of funds and staff to change their basic pro-poor policies, etc

SECTION B

4. CREDIT PROGRAMME ANALYSIS

4. 1 THE ROLE OF CREDIT IN THE SURVIVAL STRATEGIES AND EMPOWERMENT

In this section, an analysis has been made based on the discussions held at various branches, areas and groups as per the trade practices made by women.

Chennai

According to the figures of the 'narrative report of the WWF and the ICNW' from January 2001 to June 2001 there are in total 3682 new members and 5319 old members in North, South and Central Chennai in that period.
Karimodu, Chennai:
Our first visit in Madras in Northern Madras, Karimodu area (means, 'heaps of coal' area) is to a group of women who have joined just 4 months back, borrowing for the first year. The women are self-employed doing different types of vending such as idli, tamarind, garlic, blouse pieces, and miscellaneous items. Organiser is Saraswati, a very committed and hard working woman. She has organised 140 groups in 2 years. We come in the slum. Men are sitting and gambling. Rubbish heaps are part of the 'streetscape'. At the end of the street is a painting of Hammer and Sickle. Is the Communist Party active here? The people say that this is in another street, not here. The houses look very poor. It is really slum. Women wear almost no jewels.

We stand in front of the house of the group leader, while other women have gathered there. The credit group has 10 people. 6 are de facto (of which 3 de jure) female headed as their husbands do not, or very little contribute to the household income. Husbands spend their wages mainly on alcohol and for their personal use. There is only one good husband looking after his family.

The leader has an idli shop. They are from the Scheduled Caste (Dalits) community. She is 38 years and has 3 children (8th and 9th standard). She tells that she bought Rs 200 bulk rice from the Rs 800 (leader) loan, dress for the children and Rs 60 for investment in her shop. One idli she sells for Rs 1.50 and dossa for Rs1.25 each. Husband is a construction worker. With 6 to 8 hours work a day she earns Rs 15.

Most women are thali makers', the gold thread that is used by married women. They are busy with cutting ropes in a special way. Then they twist it and colour it. Three women are necessary for making the thali. For 15 days they invest Rs 500 and have 10 bundles and can make 120 threads. Sometimes they spoil two bundles. They are getting an income of 20-30 rupees per day after meeting the costs.

Laxmi told that her sons deserted her. 'Now my life is secure'. Husband died (he was construction worker and drinking a lot) and she was left behind with 3 small children. She says, 'we are not hungry anymore'. She earns Rs 20 a day in the snack shop. House rent is Rs 200. One owner seems to own the whole street.

Devi is an old woman and sells garlic, tamarind and chilipowder. She is 49 years and her husband died as he falls from the roof while constructing a house. There was no compensation as the people of the house to be constructed were also very poor. She has 2 sons and one daughter. She has 3 shares as she took the first loan of Rs 600. She used the loan to pay off Rs 200 debt, Rs 50 house rent and she invested in Rs 300 garlic. She sets apart Rs 10 per day to invest in next days trade. She sits at the road and sells and that is no problem. One son is helping her with approx. Rs 2000 per year.

Our discussion reveals that before they had to face the shouting of the moneylender who abused them. Many came on cycle in this street, telling, 'take money, take money'. They had to pay high interest and there was a lot of quarrel and shouting. Almost all the women said that they were earlier taking loans from “Thandal” ad 120% per annum and thus they were liberated from such indebtedness. The women show their saving books, which reveals that they are able to save Rs 30 a month. An other woman states that wife beating has become less now she borrowed this Rs 600 and has a living from that. In the training of the WWF they came to know various atrocities against women.
When it comes to political empowerment, the women do not have any idea of participating in the elections. But the women sought some of the basic issues such as drinking water for the community from the local traditional leader collectively. To get drinking water, they went to the leader of the slum. Husbands intimidated them by telling, 'Why this political leader is so eager to listen to your problems?' Women say, 'now we are saving we will put the pump on our own, not asking to anyone'. This shows substantial empowerment of the women. Before not knowing the forum they were not saving, and now they know that even when they die somebody of the forum will come for the funeral. Some of the women had taken insurance for their aged mothers who are not cared by their “sons” as per the norms of the society, and hope that this would help them to have a decent funeral. One woman tells, that she took a life insurance for her deaf old mother. Therefore she had to pay membership fee for the union in the name of her mother. They pay Rs 25 and are entitled to Rs 5000 for the funeral.

The women face domestic violence in the form of wife beating by their husbands. In general, domestic violence or abuse by men within the household is considered as private, and women admit in silence, which remains to be addressed. Now a days they do not demand money from their husbands for meeting the household expenses, and they said that they are not bothered about them to take up responsibility. We talk on the alcohol drinking of the men. They are of the opinion that men will not come for an anti alcohol training organised by the WWF. Men will tell, 'who are you to say I should not drink??' One woman told, 'I will show him how I came up in life and then he will reform.' Most of the men are addicted to liquor, gambling and do not take up family responsibility. A young woman tells that she had to pay bribe Rs 200 for delivery in the hospital which is officially free of cost.

Mylapore, Dr. Natesan Road, Krishnampet: 6-year-old credit group
The three members of the mission re-visited the group in Mylapore and could interview 4 women who had been interviewed in 1996. In this way a good insight could be obtained of the changes that happened over a time-span of 5 years. One 'new' woman was interviewed: a widow, her husband died because of too much alcohol drinking. The credit group consists in 2001 of 11 members. The members of the group are engaged in fruit selling, flower, vegetables, either in streets or in a particular place or to regular customers. One woman sells cheap factory made imported sarees, which are bought by poor women, by instalments. Her clients are not able to go to a shop and to pay the whole amount for the saree. Obviously, there is a huge need for sellers delivering goods on account basis.

Caste wise and socio-economically the group is relatively homogeneous: nine women are from the Backward Caste group of the Vanniyars; one is a Naicker and one from Mudaliar caste. Still the group lives in palm huts on encroached temple land. That is the reason that they did not get electricity five years ago. They can buy electricity (Rs 600 for two months) now, but it is too expensive for them. In comparison with five years ago it is visible that the 'katcha' houses have been improved. In front of their slum is still the municipal drinking water container. They pay one rupee for two pots of water. Women have to make use of a public latrine. They pay Rs 1 each time and for children 50 paisa. A problem is that the latrine closes 10 o’clock in the evening.

It is remarkable that some of the interviewed women mentioned other ages as should be expected (see overview). Does that mean that they don't know their ages? The improvement in the conditions of the women could be traced at first view from their appearance. Many were wearing golden chains and earrings now. A photo, made five
years ago, during the visit of the evaluation members in 1996 showed these differences in appearance very well.

The former leader of the group has been replaced because of calamities in her family and sickness\(^\text{17}\): she was not able to repay her loan in time. The old and the new leader borrowed Rs 1800 one month ago. The other members got a loan of Rs 1400. There is a clear increase in daily profits although the devaluation of the value of the money should be kept in mind. Daily profits ranged from Rs 15/- to Rs 50/- in 1996 but now the range was Rs 50/- to Rs 150/-.

The fact that the women seemed to be able to repay the loans they took over a period of six years indicates the economic stability that has come in their life. The social empowerment was reflected in their action to rescue women in their small neighbourhood who were beaten by their husbands. Moreover they said, that they don't abuse widows any more. However, they said the same already five years ago. They succeeded to demand for a street lamp in front of their ward and participated in the protest demonstration against the hike in diesel and petrol prices. The women vegetable sellers complain that the police is looting the vegetable lorries and ask bribes for sitting at the pavement: 2 to 3 times a month they have to pay Rs 5. There is no place for them at the market.

Comparison 1996-2001 of 4 women in 6th year credit group Mylapore, Madras.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Commuity</th>
<th>Children</th>
<th>Marital Status</th>
<th>Loans Taken</th>
<th>Amount of Loan Rs. 1996-2001</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Impact</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Saradha (old leader)</td>
<td>46 in 1996 and 50 in 2001</td>
<td>Vanniyar B.C</td>
<td>4 on 1 son died</td>
<td>Married (1996) in 2001</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>600- 1800</td>
<td>1996: Vegetable Seller, daily investment 500 rs, profits 20-50 in 1996, 2001: investment of Rs 1000 and profit of Rs 100 to Rs 150. She buys vegetables in stock together with Vidya.</td>
<td>She works; she eats and has tea and coffee. She wants to borrow Rs. 5000 to marry her son and to perform the ceremony for her expired husband.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{17}\) The other mission member understood that the leader has been replaced because of misuse of money for other purposes.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Govindamma</td>
<td>50 (1996), 50 in 2001</td>
<td>Vanniyar</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>400-1 400</td>
<td>Cut Piece, 100 per month in 1996, selling textile, sarees, shirts, pants.</td>
<td>Husband does not contribute (1996) Now my life is good; I have gold (2001) Two sons contribute money to her when they can.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meena</td>
<td>25 in 1996 and 30 in 2001</td>
<td>Vanniyar</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>400-1 400</td>
<td>Fruit Seller, profit 20 to 30 rs in 1996, 2001: sells better quality fruits. Investment Rs 500 for 4 days, Profit 50 to 60 RS.</td>
<td>Husband does not contribute in 1996. Now better food, can educate children, husband scared and considers the children now not as ‘your’ but ‘our’ children.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The table shows that of the 4 women around 50 years of age, 2 have become a widow in the past 5 years. Their investments and what they call ‘daily profits’ (not clear if labour costs are included) have gone up. Trades are upskilled, e.g. from fruit seller to better quality fruit, from cut pieces to general textile. In the case of Meena it is remarkable that her husband is much more supportive after seeing that she was able to feed and to educate the children. When they were poor he always spoke of ‘your children’ now he talks about ‘our children’.

**Pallavan Salai, Sathyavani Muthu Nagar: 12 years old credit group**

A voluntary organisation came in late 1988 to ask the WWF to do something for the Dalit women. They got 60 members in one time (behind Central station, 100 families). They live in a very narrow slum next to a small Church and Scottish cemetery. Now the WWF formed 4 new groups in this area and 140 households out of 500 are covered. The group consists now of 13 members (in 1996, 9). One woman died and one left and new members joint. The group consists of Dalit women (there is only one Muslim converted Catholic woman) and formed a homogeneous group of 9 members in 1996. Seven members of the women interviewed in 1996 could be traced, and interviewed again in 2001. Now the group seems more polarised, which is reflected in the physical appearance (some gained much in weight) of the women and their dress and gold jewellery they wear. Of the re-encounter with the 7 members at least three are still not out of the poverty trap (two have no jewellery and look very thin), while others look more well to do. The leader is still the leader and the successor of her mother. They live in the same long street with many ‘pacca’ houses. The leader got 5400 Rs loan now (in 1996, 1400) for

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18 The group was visited by the three mission members and Mrs Jaya Arunachalam, who spoke to the women and translated our questions.
the 12th time; one member got Rs 3400 (in 1996, 200, she has very good business) and all the other members 2800 Rs\textsuperscript{19}. The leader is still trading in sarees, but not in cutpieces any more, and could invest in a grinder. All members are grinding customers (2 rs per kg, outside it is 3 rs). It is remarkable that none of the women changed her occupation. The plastic bag making remains the main work for many women. Also the design and material is the same. Rani has an alcoholic husband who is not contributing to the household. She manages the household alone, and has spread her risk of loss by taking up one more activity (firewood, the waste material from the crates of which the plastic strips come to make the baskets). Now she has three different sorts of work: flower selling (more in the morning), basket making (during the day) and firewood selling (more in the evening). According to the rhythm of the day and season, and flow of the money she changes her trade. She repaired her house and could buy jewels for her daughter. Some women got three more children in the past 5 years. Arpudha is a widow and has to raise 5 daughters: 3 boys went to Bombay and do not support her, or the education of their sisters. Her life improved only a little during the past 5 years. It is touching and admirable to see how strong and creative these women are in managing their, and their children’s, life and work.

During the interview some women are busy making plastic bags from scrap plastic in order not to loose time. They tell that a middleman comes to buy the baskets. They can sell them now for Rs 15/- each, in 1996 for Rs 10. Rs 5 of more profit per basket over a time span of 5 years is certainly not covering the rise in prices and raw material. If they work hard they can make two or three a day. They buy the raw material in bulk. One member of the group has been involved in saree business and was able to make good returns. Her loan from the Forum is 3400, but her total investment is about 10.000. She hopes she can handle up to 20000 rupees. There are few idli sellers in this group, who could get a cash margins of 30 rupees per day and the family is able to eat two meal per day.

Comparison 1996-2001 of 12th year credit group Pallavan Salai slum, Madras.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Community</th>
<th>Children</th>
<th>Marital Status</th>
<th>Loans Taken</th>
<th>Amount of Loan Rs.</th>
<th>Purpose, occupation</th>
<th>Impact</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Selvi, lot of jewels, gained much in weight</td>
<td>35 in 1996 now 38. Got three more sons as she wanted a daughter</td>
<td>Harijan</td>
<td>(3) 6 0</td>
<td>Married, husband electrician</td>
<td>12th</td>
<td>1) 400 2) 600 3) 800 4) 1000 5) 1400 12) 5400</td>
<td>Saree, 120 a month Grinder, 40 rupees a day</td>
<td>Could buy grinder and buys textile for 40,000 value each six months. Daughter of Kasturi,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kuppabai, lot of jewels, gained much in</td>
<td>33 in 1996 and</td>
<td>Harijan</td>
<td>3 1</td>
<td>Married, husband at the</td>
<td>12th</td>
<td>1) 200 2) 400 3) 400 4) 600</td>
<td>Cut piece &amp; Sarees -Do-</td>
<td>She wants more loan 20,000. Takes 10,000 value textiles from</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textsuperscript{19} The fact that the leader and only one member doing obviously very good business in sarees get much higher loans than the usual members is interesting. It might indicate that certain organisers favour certain people over others, or that for bank reasons known more creditworthy clients are sought.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Marital Status</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Income</th>
<th>Additional Information</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pyari Begam, looks thin and poor</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>Married, second wife</td>
<td>Sold clothes</td>
<td>12th</td>
<td>1) 200 2) 400 3) 400 4) 600 5) 600 12th) 2800</td>
<td>Husband alcoholic and came down more: lives with other women. Her life slightly improved. Needs not more loan as she cannot repay. 3 sons studying, two other sons help her to pay education for the others, more food</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dhanalakshmi not feeling well</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Married,rickshaw driver</td>
<td>Plastic Bag Making</td>
<td>12th</td>
<td>1) 200 2) 400 3) 400 4) 600 5) 600 12) 2800</td>
<td>Bought grinder, no moneylender, and good food.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R.Rani</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Married,rickshaw driver</td>
<td>Flower Selling</td>
<td>12th</td>
<td>1) 200 2) 400 3) 400 4) 600 5) 600 12) 2800</td>
<td>Husband still alcoholic. Repaired house, could buy jewels for daughter. She manage alone and always one of the trades will give some profit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arpudhamari, no jewels, simple saree</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>Widow</td>
<td>Vegetable Seller</td>
<td>12th</td>
<td>1) 200 2) 400 3) 400 4) 600 5) 600 12) 2800</td>
<td>Husband died of alcoholics. Her boys went to Bombay and do not support the education of daughters. Youngest 12 and 14 years and run the shop. She sells vegetables outside. Her life improved a little.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kasthuri</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>Widow</td>
<td>Snack shop</td>
<td>12th</td>
<td>1) 600 2) 800 3) 1000 4) 600 5) 600 12) 2800</td>
<td>Loan 2800, invested Rs 500 in raw material, bought 2300 jewels and repaid her debts.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
What is the impact of 12 years taking loans? Visibly, we could trace some house improvements in the slum. Some houses of members had a well maintained thatched roof and some huts some whitewashed mud walls. Many women were able to buy golden chains and earrings for themselves and for their daughters dowry and bought good sarees. In 1996 some of these women were suffering from hunger and too poor to save: only small amounts of 5 to 10 rupees they put in the bank. Now much higher savings were mentioned. The education of children was also mentioned as an impact of taking the loan. The investment capital has gone up considerably in two cases and these women want higher loans from the WWF. One lady gave the realistic reply that she wanted not a higher loan as she will not be able to repay.

Also in this slum the alcohol problem of men was, and is, rampant. However, women show a more independent attitude. ‘I have my income and he is responsible for his own behaviour’ seems to be the attitude. All women have a life insurance, which will be paid after their death to their daughters. They participated in the WWF demonstrations and actions for getting more drinking water in summer, improvement of drainage and getting electricity.

**Dindigul Branch:**

Visited Thomayarpuram and Kamatchipuram to meet the members of the credit system. In case of Thomayarpuram, individual households were visited to assess the benefit of credit in the livelihood of women. At Kamatchipuram, there are many women’s groups and representatives from these groups are met. At K.Dharumathupatti, a public meeting called mass meeting was held wherein about 150 women have gathered and women shared their stories.

**Thomayarpuram:**

At Thomayarpuram, two households were visited where one of the household was involved in making shoes and chappals and the other one bronze lock making cottage industry. In both the cases, it is observed that the trades were more of a traditional one. The scaling up has taken place with new investments from purchase of machineries, more investment in purchase of raw materials, elimination of middlemen in supply of raw materials. In both the cases, the women play a supportive role along with other family members such as husband (Ms.Valliammal- shoe maker) and children who are also engaged in the same business. The shoemaker markets the produces in a more organized way by selling to the whole sale trader in the town and at times at the weekly shandies, or at the platforms when there is a crisis. The investments has raised from 300 rupees to 10,000 rupees. In case of the Bronze lock maker, her husband was working as a coolie being engaged by another factory on daily wages basis. About 30 years back, he came out as a coolie and then started to work on piece rate basis where the materials been supplied to her. Since she came in touch with the WWF 15 years ago, they could set up their own small cottage industry and all her three sons and her husband are working in the industry. In both the cases, the improvements had been in their own business, in terms of scaling up, investments in housing and living conditions, and educating the children. In both the cases, men take a lead role in marketing the produces. The decisions and control over income been made jointly.
Kamatchipuram:
In this place, there are 5 groups and representatives from these groups totally numbering about 10 members gathered for discussions who belong to different groups. There are about 40 households in the village of whom almost all the women were members in the WWF. Most of them own agricultural lands and are engaged in own agriculture. The members are engaged in agriculture work and are engaged in flower vending, vegetable selling, milch animal rearing, and petty shop keeping. Almost all the women stated that they have taken up these trades because of the availability of credit at lower interest rates by the Forum. The detailed discussions with few members reveal the fact that the vegetable trade is not flourishing due to price rises as most of them are selling the vegetables in streets as vendors. The flower vending is somewhat better. On an average, these women get a margin of 30-40 a day.
An interview with a petty shop keeper reveals the fact that she could get only 20/- rupees a day. The earnings in these trades goes to feed their families, redeeming the land, which was mortgaged, paying off debts, and arranging marriages for their children etc.
In general the prices increases in the transport, electricity and food including the vegetables affect them more. The recent prize hike in Tamil Nadu has been most spoken about.
There are no reports of wife beating of alcoholism in these two places. The women sought for reduction of the interest rates from the WWF.

K. Dharumathupatti:
The public sharing of the stories of women, around 150 at this place, has thrown light on how these women who set trend from agricultural wage labour to self employment, has also got another dimension that these women’s labour are being exploited by their own husbands, and sons and son in laws and at the end of the day it so happens that they are left with starting from scratch again. The alcoholism, wife abuse and beating never decreased.
Some of the older women have participated in the credit programme for the last 15 years and ventured as a self-employed women. They had been shouldering the responsibility of the household for the several years, acquired assets for the family, educated their children, arrange marriages for them, set up business for their sons and son in laws. Ultimately, none is looking after them now. Again their survival depends on the business and they have to be on their own.
In most cases, the income, which they meant is just sufficient to meet the opportunity costs for their own labour. In case of snack stalls such as Idli and Paniyaram shops, besides getting 30 rupees of their labour costs in cash the children are also fed everyday. This is similar in almost all the places.

Anumantha Nagar:
In this village, group members of 10 years of participation in the credit programme were met. Almost all the women were above 50 years of age except 2 out of 10 member group. Two members of the group are doing Idli and Paniyaram selling, one petty shop keeper who deals with vegetables and chicken stall, and the rest are having milch animals. None of these women own any land for cultivation and the cattle feed is procured at costs. This makes just both ends meet. All these women have started with having chicken first, then tried goats and then chosen the trades as to what they do now. Almost all these women are female headed households either de facto or de jure and the main breadwinner of the families. Two of the women are really older than 65 years.
and whose husbands are bedridden and taken care by them. Out of this one lady has to
graze her animal from morning to evening besides procuring the feed from shop. These
women broke out with emotions as their sons who had been taken care of by them,
educated by them are not taking any responsibility. Except the petty shop keeper who
deals with more than one product, all other women get 10-30 rupees a day which is
meant for their opportunity labour costs.
In recent times, the animal grazing has become a problem as more and more lands
been occupied by the land owners. Also since the women are growing older, it is not
physically possible for them to graze their lands.

It was discussed with the women whether it is possible for them to think of leasing out a
land collectively such that they can grow fodder crops. The women said that there are
“puramboke” lands in the village, which could be obtained through negotiations. It was
advised that these women could collectively lease out the land and grow fodder crops
such that fodder for the cattle could be met and it becomes more viable. The advisory
and technical support could be sought from the Department of Agriculture at Dindigul.

Adhiramapattinam:
The present areas of coverage in this region are 210 out of which 10 are fishing villages
and the rest from other occupations.

Keelathottam:
This is a fishing village where the prawn fishing is carried out during the months of
December to January and the rest of the year other miscellaneous fish is caught.
Throughout the year, a fish called Thesa fish is caught. There are 1200 households in
this village with about 400 head loader women. The women also have to go to
Kattumavadi, Sethubava chatram, Mallipattinam for purchase of fish. Since two years,
the total fish landings in this village is also on the diminishing side.
There are four women’s groups in this village who are participating in WWF. One of the
group consisting of 10 members were met. The loans taken by these women were
mainly used for purchase of dhonis and nets. The women’s role in fish marketing is
quite significant. Therefore, their loans been utilized for nets and donis which would fetch
them a higher share of fish catches from fishing operations if done jointly by men. Like in
any other fishing village, the prawns, and crabs are sold through the fish merchant and
these women take up low value fish for sale through head loads and in markets. The
rate differences in sale of prawns would be cent percent in either selling through the
trader of by direct themselves, yet they are to come out of this.
However, the women said that earlier they were borrowing money from other sources
called “kendo vaddi” and were repaying on a weekly basis which were of 10% per week
which means about 560% per annum and they were able to repay only the interest part
regularly and the principal remained the same. The women are happy to have come out
this kind of vicious circle of poverty.

There are two young girls who also go out for fishing in the sea using small catamarans
themselves. The training given by the forum also made them to think about these
changes. The only problem, which the women were not able to resolve is relating to
drinking habit of men especially the husbands. The sons do not pick up this habit these
days. The daughters who are engaged in fishing also started questioning their fathers
that they do not take liquor irrespective of the fact that fishing is a laborious work and
they get physically tired by end of the day- then why men only to drink? This question remains to be answered.
The women are also part of the Union and they have fought for the burial place, street light, water for the households. The household level electricity is being sought. After joining the sangam, there has been high amount of cooperation among the members, trust and mutual help and also intervene in cases to bring cordial relationship among husband and wife in cases of fights. The role of the organisers and the leaders been recognized by the women. The major factor contributing to non-repayment is seasonal variations in the fish landings and marketing. The women sought for more size of loans and less interest rates from WWF.

**Peikrikadu:**
In this village there are 400 households and 20 groups are functioning. The major occupation of these women is making roof materials out of coconut leaves. The village is full of coconut groves owned by landlords of other communities namely the Muslims. The women and men of this village are just labour working in the farms and maintaining them. There are commission agents, who buy the leaves in bulk and engage the local women to make the roof materials and sell it for a better price. Since WWF has been offering the credit since few years, many of the women who were agricultural coolies and wage labour in making the roofing have now been self-employed. The detailed discussions with regard to cost benefit were held with these women. On the whole, it appears that they are able to make 8400 rupees per annum working @ 60 rupees per day over a period of 7 months (5 days in a week). Since the group, whom we met were a new group, not much information could be obtained on the impact of increase in the income. The alternate livelihood was 20 rupees per day of agriculture wage labour.

**Mass Meeting held at Adhiramapattinam:**
A gathering of 90 women were met and discussions were held occupation wise to know the cost benefit of doing their ventures, the impact of economic policies on their business, and on women and their families, the empowerment process that has been happening to them. As stated earlier, the vegetable seller and the petty shopkeepers were much affected by the rise in prices and increasing competitions. The fishing, coir, roofing material making being affected by the seasonality coupled with prices of transport, increasing prices and competitions.

**Bangalore**

**Amali Thoddi:***
Here, majority of women are involved in sericulture. The time of our visit coincided with the off-season, only one household was involved in this. The woman reported that her family is involved in sericulture producing pupae in 40 plates with an investment of Rupees 2500/- and gets 5000/- after meeting the costs. There are five members in the family and all of them except two of their children are involved in their work. In a year, they do this activity and yield five times and the total income earned is rupees 12500/- p.a. Besides this she does flower sales for three months in a year during the off season and earns rupees 25 per day. Earlier, they did not had any land, and with the help if credit assistance, they could get a land on lease basis and do mulberry cultivation and
flower. She has purchased the wooden racks for keeping the “plates” and also improved housing conditions. Now she thinks of arranging the marriage for her daughter.

**Onganur:**
Here, the toy makers and agarbathi rollers who are participating in the credit programme for the last 5 years were met and discussions were held. Most of the toy makers were not involved in the trade by themselves earlier, even though it is their traditional occupation. The access to credit has enabled them to take up this occupation with ownership of the tools for the trade. Of the five loans availed, almost all the women had purchased the tools for the trade using the first loan. The later loans were used to purchase the blocks meant for making different toys, paying of old debts, raw materials, household items, gold jewellery, children’s education. We can say that about 60% of the loan amount had been used for productive purposes and the rest for consumption purposes. By owning the tools for the trade, the women are no more engaged themselves as labour working on piece rate basis.

The women are dependant on the middlemen for supply of raw materials (Alay wood) for making toys and also depend on them for marketing. Some of the women are thinking of making collective marketing of their produces thereby they get good margins. The average earning per day through production of toys are rupees 20. The women complain of chest, back and neck pains besides Asthma and bronchial diseases.

The agarbathi roller women were heavily dependent on the middlemen for supply of raw materials and sales. Now with the help of credit assistance with women were able to invest Rupees 100 per week producing about 35000 sticks and make an earning of rupees 50 per week. This means an average earning of rupees 7 per day. The loans availed were also used for other consumption purposes such as children’s education, roofing, medical expenses etc. These women also have occupational health hazards.

**Halla gurda Halli:**
This is situated within Bangalore city. The women live in rented premises with adequate water and sanitation facilities. 11 member women’s group who are mainly involved in Agarbathi was met. Almost all the women’s husbands are working as daily wage laborers and are addicted to drinking habits and are not contributing to the families. These women have taken up agarbathi making as an employment of last resort. The raw materials were being supplied by the traders and women were engaged as labour on piece rate basis. Now most of these women buy the raw materials on their own and roll the agarbathis. Some of them are able to sell the produces directly in some wholesale shops. However the average earnings per day is amounting to 20 rupees per day. There is a sense of unity and help each other at times of distress. The loans were used for other purposes like repaying of old debts and children’s education.

**Hyderabad**
At Hyderabad, the place visited was Chownigulam Murthuja at Faluknama area where women’s groups engaged in Chumki or embroidery work and kite making. The embroidery workers are dependant on the middlemen for getting orders. The leader of the group (consisting of 9 members) engage 4 of their members by pooling their money together for purchase of thread and chumki and get orders. She engages them by paying a wage labour including herself and gets paid for the work by the middlemen. On an average she is able to pay Rupees 14-20 per day depending on the quantum of work
done. The total revenue above the labour costs are shared among them on monthly basis.

In case of investing in the cloth also, then there will be a profit of Rupees 50-100 per saree which can be made in 2-3 days. The women in the group are related to one another. The women are able to exercise control over the money that they earn, but the physical control is not there. Most of them reported to have husbands who abuse them. Almost all their husbands are engaged as rickshaw pullers or auto rickshaw pullers. The women in the age group of about 35-40 years do not have followed any family planning measures and each one is having 10-11 children. We could see the absolute poverty.

The impacts of the credit programme on the livelihood of these women are that now they are able to eat food properly without starvation, dependence on their husbands reduced, each woman is able to earn their livelihood.

At Falaknama, a group of women who are engaged in kite making and safety pin making were met. The impact of the credit programme is that these women are now able buy the raw materials and make the kites and supply against orders taken from the whole sale traders. Earlier they were engaged as labour for a payment of Rupees 8 per day. Now the total earnings per day are rupees 20-50. The safety pin makers are able to do one part of the safety pins. The credit programme has enabled them to buy the machineries (earlier supplied by the middlemen) and do it. The raw materials and sale are routed through the middlemen. The total earnings per day works out to be 5-10 per day. The women work long hours. In case of kite makers, most of the money being spent towards raw materials. The safety pin makers were able to diversify into more number of trades namely setting up petty shops, food processing such as pickle and masala powder making and thus improve their income. The increased earnings are spent for the children’s education.

**Narsapuram:**

**Sarveswara Garu Thottam:**

In this place, the lace makers group were met and discussions were held to know about their occupation, the impacts of credit programme in their livelihood. Earlier, the women were depended on the traders for supply or yarn for making the lace and will have to sell to them. Due to credit availability, the young women are able to buy the yarn and sell them directly in shandies. The older women still have to depend on the middlemen for supply of yard and marketing. The wage labour per day is about Rupees 3 based on whatever the quantum of produces they are able to make. In case of direct sale in the market the wage labour per day works out to be 5 per day. In case, they are able to sell in the shandies, then the profit margins will be 20-30 per day. All these women are having women headed families, taking up the sole responsibility for the household. The husbands of the older women are already too old and had to be supported by the wives. These women had spent their lifetime in spending their earnings in educating the children, getting them good employment, but ultimately left alone in their old age to be on their own.
**Malkipuram:**
The organisers, the staff members of ICNW and the Coordinator were met to know their perceptions on their role in credit programme. There are 6 organisers, 1 Trainer, 4 ICNW staff and 1 Forum staff. There are 15000 members participating in the Forum. Majority of the members are involved in rope making, cashew nut breaking, fishermen, lace weavers and weavers.

The major gender issues are desertion, no male contribution to families, drinking habits of men, dowry, sons not taking care of their parents in old age and so on. Recently, a member was raped by a gang of youth and as a result the girl died. No punishments been extended for whatever been happened When a question was raised as to what the Forum or the local women’s group done about this issue, they lacked clarification legally on how to proceed. Therefore they were advised of legal proceedings to be taken against the culprit besides, making protest against it.

**Anthervedi:**
The women’s group involved in weaving cotton sarees were met and group discussions were held with them. The loan amount started with Rupees 400 and now women are getting about 1600/- rupees. The women said that the loan amount been invested in purchasing parts of the loom, and in some cases complete looms. Most of them are still dependent on the middlemen called Sait for supply of raw materials and marketing. In each household, there are two to three looms majority of which are owned by the middlemen.

On an average, the women are able to earn Rupees 20 per day. When a question was raised as to what amount of loan would eliminate them from the clutches of middlemen, the women said that they may require a minimum of 10000/- rupees to own the looms. Even otherwise, the women and their families feel that they cannot come out of the clutches or rather do not want to come out due to the reasons that they depend on him for many other social needs such as meeting expenses for marriages, sickness or any other unforeseen expenses. The women are doubtful or rather do not want to do marketing of the produces on their own due to this dependency factor.

The women also opined that there is no direct marketing for them as the cost of production on their own will be higher than the one which is being supplied by the middlemen. This is due to the fact, that the weaving involves several spinning and pre preparation stages, and for each stage, it involves certain amount of expenditure But the middlemen is able to reduce its costs as he is engaging different people for doing different stages of weaving. Then, final product is made in the loom. The women said that by owning the looms they were able to reduce the cost of commission which was charged by the middlemen from out of the wage labour paid to them.

**Coconut coir Rope makers:**
None of the members who are involved in coconut coir rope making were met, but the organisers themselves are involved in this trade in their families. In general this trade been affected due to a type of mite affecting the coconut yields. As a result, the shells which were purchased for 60 paise are now available for 2 rupees and therefore the whole industry been affected.
The coir pith is available per cart load @150 rupees and they are able to sell the finished product @250 which takes about 15-20 days which means the average earnings per day is about rupees 5. Here too, the women sell the final products through the middle men as they do not find a niche market for it.

**Cashew nut breakers:**
A group of women who are involved in breaking the cashew nuts were met. The leader of the group has mobilized all the loans that has been given to the group members and are engaged in buying the cashews roasted in bulk quantities. The women break the cashews and get a revenue of profits 70 per week without considering the wage labour. The amounts raised are recycled in the business. This is the fifth time that they are availing the loan and all the previous loans were spent towards household expenses, one woman has helped her husband to set up a cycle shop.

The women feel that they can set up the business without men folk and secondly, they could take up a venture jointly.

**Palakol:**
At Palakol, there are 15000 members in about 1000 groups and 50% of them are lace workers, milk vendors 25%, other hawkers and vendors form 25%. Here the discussions were held with the Organisers and staff members to know about the women members. According to them, the women having milch animals are able to get 60/- rupees per day (cost =20, revenue=80 and profit=60/-) on a regular basis. The women are keeping animals in a business motive such that during the dry spells, they sell the cattle and replace with milking ones. Thus they are able to get revenue on a regular basis.

The lace makers are able to get 1000/- per month as profits as they are able to sell in the *shandies* directly. The women in this area are able to pool their produces and sell it in *shandies* thereby making good amount of profits. They are also able to make calculated risk, by judging the changes in the market trends.

**Bhimavaram:**
Here, a group of women who have availed larger loan amounts were met and brief discussions were held to know their trades. These women have taken a loan amount of Rupees 7000 to 10000 and have taken different ventures like Hotel industry, ready-made garments sale, vegetable sales at market places. Most of the women who have taken up *saree*, cloth and ready made garment making are getting a very good returns of income ranging from 3000 to 7000 per month.

**Kanchipuram branch**
There are 17 organisers, 9 bank staff, 1 WWF staff, 1 Union staff and 2 trainers. Health workers are incorporated in the staff. There are 9 mobile branches. They sit on the temple veranda and have no special building. The criterium to come to the village is, that if women have to pay more than Rs 10 bus fare, or the distance village-branch, is more than 25 km the bank comes to them. They work in 120 villages and 45 slums. They started in 1990, in 3 villages. They cover two districts.

We go to village Mottur were the women weavers are living. A mass meeting has been organised with microphone, and photographer. 28 women are widow out of a total of
approximately 70. Added to that 17 husbands are not contributing to the household income. 90% of the women weavers in the meeting belong to the Dalit community. Many women are former agricultural labourers but they do the weaving work now. Several women narrate their struggle from wage labourer to self-employed. Still they do agricultural labour in the season (multiple survival strategy). One woman tells that she has a daughter of 22 years and two looms in the house. She joined WWF, and was a wage worker. She could repay 1000 Rs debt, bought 1600 raw silk from her loan (5th year) and earns Rs 1000 a month with her daughter. Stories follow of women who were forced to marry very old husbands and became a widow without means of subsistence. The WWF helped them to buy their own looms and they are member of the Co-operative Society now and earn Rs 1400 a month with weaving.

It is remarkable that the weaver women when they borrow first year they get a higher loan than the normal amount: leader Rs 1400 and members Rs 1000. One woman told, 'my children are not anymore bonded'. She released them 3 years ago with the loan. Husband did not contribute. Rs 3000 debt, 2 loans paid back the debt. 3 loan bought weaving equipment. 4, 5 years now. When she works 15 days, she can make 3 sarees and earns Rs 1500 per month, each saree wage is Rs 500 for a simple one.

All the women have a story that after 3 loans they could come up a little bit. There is an old lady telling that on top of the hell a small light (the WWF) is burning. Thanks to the forum she arranged an inter-caste marriage with no dowry for her daughter. She even stood candidate in the Panchati Raj elections. She got 350 votes but could not make it. Next time she will try again.

We visit some houses to see the weaving. It is shocking, unbelievable: a thin lady is sitting in a dark loom-pit and weaving. She has 10 years loan. She weaves 3 sarees in 1.5 month. For a simple saree she gets Rs 500 and very skilled ones Rs 1500. She was indebted and from the first loan she bought herself free. From the second she bought a loom, She took now a Rs 10,000 loan to invest in technology (jacquard). Kind of card with holes in it. Her son was pledged for Rs 2000.-. Mother-in-law, parents pledged her three years ago for Rs 5000. Her husband was also pledged by his parents for Rs 6000.

We go to the next house. Mother and daughter are behind the loom. Two girls were pledged for Rs 5000 and Rs 4000, husband died of alcoholism. Daughter is 13 and not going to school, but can weave everything. She learned the skills from her father.

Many other women told that there are many difficulties in supply of raw material and work the past years. The trader tells them to weave slowly, as selling is difficult and raw silk is difficult to get. In the past the trader came, fetched the woven sarees and immediately gave the silk material and the pattern for the next one. Now, the raw silk material is supplied later now. It is said that the decrease in sales of silk sarees is due to competition of new cheaper varieties of sarees in the market. The income of most of the weavers has come done because of under-employment.

Afternoon meeting with whole staff:
There are around 45000 women (and men??) weavers in this area. 25,000 are dependent on the private traders. The rest is a member of the Weavers Co-operative. trade union of the WFF organised 11,000 women weavers.
The weaver’s co-operative gives higher wages, bonus, and festival days. It gives a formal position, with inspection and repair of the house (?). It simply means that Rs 300 profit per saree can be the difference in income. To become a member of the Weavers cooperative is not easy. A share of Rs 2000 or Rs 4000 has to be bought. Three witnesses are necessary to stand guarantee. They have to wait 6 months before their application is approved. That is a question of death and life. If one is defaulting the other three will also not get the raw silk material. The co-operatives were very male dominated. **Thanks to the trade union work of the WWF there are exclusively two women weaver’s co-operatives.**

![Photo 5. Mother and daughter behind the loom](image)

It is said that 80% of the women around Kanchipuram are still in the clutches of the private traders. They have all kind of tricks to reduce the wage: the saree is not well woven, not clean. Moreover, the private traders give the material to the husbands and he collects the sarees via the husbands. Husbands get the money in his hand. In 1997 and 1998 they organised mass meetings that the 'identity cards' have to be written in the name of the women. The result is that the traders are telling now, 'let your wife come with the card'. During the past 3 years 2800 bonded children (for the majority girls) were released by the WWF. Children are necessary for a certain design that can easily made by them. This kind of design has stopped now by action of the WWF’s trade union.

WWF did one time the marketing- and selling of the sarees, but it took too much time and there was not sufficient staff to do it. They brought the woven sarees to an exhibition in Bombay (and Chennai). In one day they were sold out. Their prices were far below the private market ones. But the organisation and management was too much work. The

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20 Not clear what 'identity card' means. No time to ask clarification due to illness and overload of data.
staff is not sufficient to deal with the marketing. Moreover they need an assurance of order placement. Now men love women who know the loom work.

Needs as expressed in the meeting by the women organisers, trainers, and other staff

1. Supply of raw material by the forum and marketing
2. Night school (there is one but only for 15 children)
4. Family planning (health programme)
5. Training on girl child (labour) and not to marry them to old men.
6. Let women at home and let them do the weaving (?).
7. Occupational health. Many suffer form filaria. The eyes become already affected when they are 25/26, with 30 years they wear glasses. More need for eye camps.
8. Occupational habit is not to eat to produce more. When they are hungry they take 'pan'. They don't eat, only take tea and coffee.
9. Many women suffer from uterus infections and have the white discharge (may be from sitting all the time in the damp loom pit dug in the floor of the house). Gynaecological check-ups are urgently required. Deliveries are at home as in the hospital to much bribes have to be given (some women paid Rs 200 to the nurses and doctors).
10. Better housing conditions. In monsoon the roofs are leaking and weaving is not possible. Difficult time with hunger.

The above needs show the immense work the WWF still has to do, in particular in the field of marketing, occupational and women's health and trade-union work.

**Vellore branch**

In Vellore branch three credit groups, one group of 'alternative livelihood' trainees and tailoring class were met. The following shows what women told in our meetings. We give the details of one group as it gives a good insight in the process of improvement over the years the women took loans.

**Kaspa area 5 year old group**

The Group Leader name is Saraswathy (women who suffers from pains as during delivery she was cut in a wrong way.. doctors ridicule her but she has constantly pain in her belly and cannot work.. WWF will take her for a check up in Chennai). aged 49. Her husband is an alcoholist, and in the past beat her if she was not giving money. Never allowed her to join the forum for many years. She had joined without his knowledge. Reformed her husband after joining the Forum. Husband rolls 500 beedies a day and earns around Rs.10-15. Having 2 boys(aged 25 & 22) and 2 girls(18 & 12).All of them helping in beedi rolling. First son is working in beedi making. She pledged her 12 year old girl child for Rs.500 but redeemed her from the pledge by getting loan from the Forum . Her main occupations are beedi rolling, Leaf Cutting & capping. First loan is Rs.400, for shortage of beedi leaves. Second loan Rs.600, for Snack Shop and beedi works. Third loan Rs.800 she redeemed her girl child from the bondage. Fourth loan of Rs.1000, constructed bathroom. The last loan is Rs.1200, she want to revive her snack

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21 Thanks to Padma and Anita who assisted in the writing up of meeting with credit groups due to illness of the mission member.
Radha, aged 35, Deserted. Husband was Suspicious. Two children (1 girl & 1 boy-died). she was the former leader of the group she has give up her leadership because her husband fell in sick. struggling for her child to get educated. Her occupation is beedi rolling. The girl is studying 5th class. First loan Rs.600, redeemed her pledged girl child (aged 8) for Rs.600. Second loan Rs. 800, for the child's education. Third loan Rs.1000, bought 10 kg leaves for beedi rolling, notebooks for her child. Fourth loan Rs.1000, household items, child's education. The last loan Rs.1200, bought a goat. Provident Fund registered on her husband's name-paying Rs.240 till her husband reaches the age of 58, she will receive the amount Rs.50,000, if he dies she will receive 75,000, and a pension of Rs.250 per month. She goes to the mandi on her own. Buys 6 kg of leaves to roll the beedis. She rolls 1600/1700 beedis a day. Weekly earns Rs.300, now wage only once in 15 days. Daughter helps in capping, she fell sick, rolls 1000 beedis for Rs.5. After joining the Forum she was able to educate her child.

Sumathy, aged 23, passed 10th class. Leaf cutting learns to roll beedi. Irresponsible husband, lost everything in gambling, unemployed. Residing at rented house for Rs.250 rent paid by her mother-in-law & she is responsible for the milk for her child and rice for the whole family. Her mother died, so her father married again. First loan Rs.400, repaid debts (she is in debt due to her gambling husband). Second loan Rs.600, for her delivery expenses. Third loan, Rs.800, paid back debts. Fourth loan Rs.1000, redeemed her ration card which was pledged by her husband for Rs.500, again it was pledged by her husband. The last loan Rs.1000, rice and repaid old debts. Has 1 girl child (1 boy child died). She is waiting for her child to grow up.

S. Lakshmi, aged 22. Has three younger sisters. Mother died when she was in 6th class so she stopped her education. Irresponsible father, drinking, lottery. Beedi rolling. Educating her 3 sisters(10th, 9th and 6th). First loan Rs 400, household items: Second loan Rs.600, uniforms and notebooks. Third loan Rs.800, 1 sister redeemed (Rs.700). Fourth and last loan Rs.1000, on business investment. Not employed for 2 months. Earns Rs.50 per day, Rs.1000 per month. 3 sisters engaged in Beedi rolling earns Rs.1000. Provident Fund card on her father's name. There is no law to register Provident fund card on women it is legible only if it is registered in men's name.

P. Bhavani, aged 35. Husband has Glaucoma so no male contribution. 5 daughters redeemed one girl child (Rs.500). Occupation beedi labelling cut piece. First loan Rs. 400, debts. Second loan Rs.600, cut piece, Third loan Rs.800 tobacco, leaf. Fourth loan 800, tobacco leaf. Last loan Rs.1000 notebook, uniform. Rolls 8000 beedis for Rs.24 per day. Registered with labelling Mandi for Provident Fund card. 1000 beedi rolling by her child for Rs.40 (2 days), and 1000 beedi rolling for Rs.40 (5 days after returning from the school). She gained strength and confidence after joining in the forum.

B. Geetha, aged 29. has 3 girls and 1 son. First girl and boy aged 19 & 17 helping in beedi rolling. Occupations leaf cutting, snacks shop, tea stall. rent house. First loan Rs.400, household items: Second loan Rs.600, school fees. Third loan Rs.800 tailoring machine (second hand). Fourth loan Rs.1000 Snack shop. Fifth loan Rs.1000 tea stall.
for 1 kg leaf cutting, 2000 beedis rolled for Rs.90. snacks Rs 100-150. she said that there is no one to help her except the forum and interests are low.

Visalakshi, aged 49, leaf cutting and capping. still have debt Rs.2000. First loan Rs.400 tobacco, leaf. Second loan Rs.600, 10kg tobacco, leaf. Third loan Rs.800, vegetables. fourth loan Rs.800 delivery expenditure for her daughter. The last loan, Rs.1000 were spent on delivery expenditure for her daughter. Daily Rs.60 from vegetable shop half of which used for the family and the rest for the business. Fought for ration shop price hike, for bore well for her street. Provident fund available Rs.240 per month for it.

Pachaiyamma, aged 55, widow, lost her husband 15 years ago. Five daughters (1 son died). Outside debt for Rs.8000 got for her daughter's marriage her husband helped in marriage for 2 daughters. Leaf cutting, fruit sales, cow dung. Cuts 2000 leaves per day. She is sick having ulcer. First loan Rs.400 paid debt. Second loan Rs.600, fruit sales, debt. Third loan Rs.800, marriage debt, fruit sales. Fourth and last loan Rs1000, repaying old debts. She earns Rs.10 from cow dung Rs.20 from fruits and Rs.10 from leaf cutting.

Needs
Women want more loan. Preferable Rs 2000, double what they have now

In Vellore branch the 'alternative livelihood programme' funded by the ILO, has been visited. This new programme for 'alternatives in livelihood systems' and economic diversification was introduced for women beedi workers in Vellore and Gudiyattam in the framework of the WWF-ILO partnership program. Work options in the beedi industry are quickly shrinking as a result of 'stop smoking' campaigns and competition with mini cigarettes. In Vellore many women are involved in 'beedi' rolling, which causes serious occupational health hazards due to their exposure to tobacco dust, and long hours at work in unhygienic conditions. Women-trainees met, told that their beedi rolling mothers died at a young age of TBC. The programme has trained already 253 groups in all kind of products: soap powder making, tailoring, embroidery, jam, soft drink, incense making etc. The ILO so far financed the project but funds are depleted. Trainers from the WWF were trained at various training institutes, and impart the training for the women members. This diversification of activities seems to be successful in practice. Success stories of women in Vellore selling lots of jam and lemon-pickles were told to the mission member. It is very urgent to continue the programme and to expand it to other branches.

Two more groups were interviewed in Vellore. For the majority this women were matchbox makers. Earnings Rs 9.50 per day for 8 hours work. Child labour and pledging of children a common problem. More groups were also visited in Bangalore.

The summary of findings of Mrs Kamila is shown in Chapter 7 on Conclusions.

4.2 CREDIT PROGRAMME AND ITS CONTRIBUTION TO WWF’S OBJECTIVES

The major objective of WWF seeks to empower the poor working class women through mobilization of women into neighbourhood credit groups through a credit society. This objective has been largely achieved as women have access to Institutional credit through informal groups. Unlike the NABARD, the women need not have to pool their savings to show their ability to repay and wait for six months. The women become
eligible to get a loan if they meet any of the criteria set by the WWF and by paying a membership fee, and share capital of 10% of their loan amount, the loans are given.

The organisers and the leaders play a vital role in the credit delivery system. The organisers identify the members with a strong leadership and the leaders are chosen by the groups. The NABARD credit system, is more of vertical system in the sense that the NGO plays a vital role in formation of the groups and its strengthening. In case of WWF, there is horizontal formation of groups and its strengthening takes place in a remarkable way by the members and the leaders themselves. We also noticed that the leadership has been more democratic in nature as leadership emerges through election by members and prone to change in case of any malpractices. Each member in itself is a leader, as they take responsibility for repayment in turns and comes in direct contact with the society.

The training which is of one day duration provides conceptual clarity on the credit system and its procedure which is understood by the members and makes them more responsible.

The empowerment of women through access to credit is visible through many of the impacts as visible and outlined under the section above. The women have access to credit system, and they “can stand on their own legs.” The women control their incomes and makes decision in their households with regard to expenditures. In most cases, women said that they give pocket money to their husbands towards liquor.

In case of the lives of many older women, they have spent their entire earnings/wealth towards their children and at the old age left alone to unattended by the sons (as per norms of the society) and earn their bread and butter. The question of who benefits out of their earnings remains unanswered.

In case of collective actions of women, they are addressing the local basic issues like lack of drinking water, road, transport, access to burial ground, electricity, sanitation facilities. These are facilitated locally through the organisers of respective branches. In case of Andhra Pradesh, the collective action been taken up against Arrack issue during the year 1986. In case of Tamil Nadu, the Union has taken action against increase in petrol prices and transport fares during the year 1997. The National Union of Working Women through its reproductive health care program helped in both occupational safety measures and in reproductive health concerns. Though, now the programme is not under implementation, various aspects of the health are discussed with women during the training and further follow up.

The NUWW has extended social security schemes in the form of Insurance to 60% of members who are especially poor for partial/full disabilities and life insurance coverage. In case of life insurances, the women feel that it would assure them of a decent funeral at death.

Some of the older women still expressed their feelings as to why the insurance scheme should benefit only their children/heir in case of death and why not it benefit them when they are alive. This problem needs to be attended to by the Forum/Union as these women need social security measures during the old age rather than insurances at the time of death.
The Union activities are not quite strongly seen or visible at the grass roots level as there is no structure to support its activities at the grass roots. This could be seen as a weakness in itself, whereas the Forum thinks that it is their strength as the grass roots leadership has not been polarized to the extent that it ruins the stability of their credit programme.

In the review, it is been observed that women are getting paid much lower than the minimum wages prescribed under the Minimum Wages Act. The Union has addressed this issue in case of *beedi* rollers and yet to resolve it in other trades.

### 4.3 THE ROLE OF THE ORGANISERS/LEADERS

The organisers of the Forum originated as members, grew as leaders of the groups, and then got recruited as organisers. Each of the organisers have got their own journeys in empowerment. The leaders and the organisers including each member of the WWF play a vital role in the horizontal scaling up of the credit programme. The members, the leaders and organisers do have very good communication with each other in identification of a new member and groups, providing a helping hand to access the credit, setting up business through advisory support etc.

Detailed discussions were held with organisers in 9 areas visited to know the perceptions of them on their roles as organisers/leaders and the sample of detailed below:

**Dindigal:**

In this branch, the organisers were met and discussions were held to know about their role, the leaders’ role in the credit delivery system and the empowerment process, reasons for defaults, the improvements in the life of the organisers and the women themselves in the whole WWF work, and the common issues addressed by the Union.

The organisers themselves were grown from that of a member, and leader of groups benefiting in the Forum and then became the organisers. Most of them are female headed households taking a lead role in maintaining their families.

There are 12 organisers and 3 trainers in this branch. Each organiser looking after 230 groups in about 40-43 villages and they keep in touch with the groups once in a month. They take either public transport system or reach by walk. The organisers mentioned that the main difference in the credit delivery system by the WWF is that it is “a Loan Plus awareness” on the question of women’s subjugation. The women were borrowing @ 10% (?) rate of interest and it was difficult to get loans from other sources. The most positive aspects were relating to insurance, the trust built up among members, and the training given by WWF. The savings habits been inculcated and women have improved their savings.

The role of the organisers as they perceive were relating to ensuring repayment, providing advises to women for taking up trade or change over to other trades depending on its viability.

22 This statement is not endorsed by the mission member who visited Kanchipuram and Vellore branch. The trade union staff is working like hell but the problems are so huge that it is almost carrying water to the sea.
In reality, they mentioned that the women’s position has been that they will have to be independent to earn and live on their own. About 80% of men do not take up or have any sense of responsibility. Many of the women members including the organisers have educated their children. Now some of them have confidence to correct their husbands from being irresponsible. Some of them have become trainers from organisers and in their experience they have observed that when they conduct skill training to the women in their dwelling places, men also join them and tend to listen to them. In some of the organizers’ life, since they are being respected in the communities, their husbands acquire status and prestige because their wives are respected. The Organisers who are trained in health aspects (numbering 2) are being recognized by the local Health department. Here, in this branch, the organisers make a conscious efforts to make household visits and meet the men also in order to bring good gender relations.

**Adhiramapattinam:**
There are 12 organisers who were from the communities as a member, leader and groomed to become an organiser. Each one of these organisers has their heart breaking stories which were shared by them. There are two elderly women who at this age of 65 years are courageous enough to reach the members spread out in 10 areas consisting of 140 groups.

One of the organiser stated that she had to flee to Chennai without the knowledge of her husband by hiding herself underneath the bus seat covered by suit cases in order to reach Chennai. Another woman said, that she became a young widow and has not tasted any goodness in life except working hard for her family. The goodness includes wearing coloured dress and sarees. While sharing her experience, this woman cried.

There is yet another story of a young girl of 20 years who was forced to marry her sister’s husband at the age of 14 years. She was not given food or clothing properly and kept to work in making roofing materials out of coconut tree leaves. One day she escaped from this drudgery and reached her mother’s place. When she heard about the WWF and its credit system, she could borrow money and thus invest in buying the raw materials and started to make her living. Now she lives with her mother and pride in constructing her own house with the earnings besides buying golden ornaments. Now her husband is calling her back to live with him by promising a separate dwelling place for her. But she has determined to live on her own with her mother. She hopes to do so as long as the sangam is there to support her.

Almost all the organisers stated that their husbands acquired “status” through their wives being respected by the communities. This is indicated in many of the men in families providing support in receiving people who come in search of meeting the Organisers at home.

**Bangalore:**
The organisers, the staff members and the Coordinator were met in the branch office of Channapatna and discussions were held to know the perceptions of staff members about their role in the credit delivery system, gender perspectives and about their own self image, indicators used for assessing impact of the program, indicators used for identifying the members.
Almost all the organisers had to be on their own as their husbands are irresponsible, and addicted to liquor. In this branch, the majority of the groups above 50 groups are involved in beedi rolling, toy makers, followed by other trades of agarbathi makers, vegetable sellers etc. The Organisers perceive that formation of groups, follow up of training issues, loan delivery, skill training by trainers as their role.

4.4 NEW ECONOMIC POLICIES AND ITS EFFECT ON THE WOMEN

In general, the women who are engaged in trading agricultural produces, weaving, lace making, toy making, fisheries, are affected due to increasing prices. The exception is the saree business.

The details of two cases, fisheries and hawkers and vendors in Chennai markets are provided beneath:

**Fisheries Sector: Eripurakarai:**

In fishing villages, visited the fish landing center (“Thoniadi”) and observed the landings. Discussions been also held with men traders, commission agents, women traders and boat owners. The main fishing activity constitutes prawns and crabs which is been sold through the middlemen. The purchase of boats and nets costs more than 1 to 1 ½ lakh of rupees and therefore, naturally the women’s families will have to borrow money from these middlemen. All other fish catches are auctioned through the appointed auctioneer who collects 10% of the sale proceeds. The only benefit which women attributed were relating to the availability of women taking marketing as their occupation (this process of change been happening since last five years due to diminishing fish catches and the low volume of fish available for sale). Earlier the men used to take the fish for marketing directly or by storing using ice overnight. The price of ice is also becoming expensive such that most of the families, women are turning out into marketing venture. Especially over the last two years there has been acute low volume of catches and therefore, more women have taken fish marketing as a last resort of their livelihood for their survival as head loaders.

The approach to the seashore been a nightmare walking across the muddy and thorny stretches and into the water to reach the auctioning and landing site. The men and women do reach this place every day and night. Later, one of the market place was also visited. There are four fish markets in Adhiramapattinam. The whole sale trader and retail vendors participating in the Forum as well non-beneficiaries were also met. The women members are all new to the marketing venture directly for the last five years and they said that they have to be mobile enough to procure fish at times visiting their neighbourhood villages also.

On the other hand, the commission agent who is auctioning at the market place said that in general, the fishing is in downward trend which is been dealt by head loader retail women whose number been increasing in recent times. The head loaders are quite active in recent times and they procure fish from place to place. There are two exclusive
markets meant for Muslim women customers run by the Mosque, which are catered by the women fish vendors- men are not allowed inside.

For dried fish processing and marketing, the salt is now becoming expensive as most of the salt beds are converted into prawn hatcheries. Due to new economic policies of the Government, the ban on aqua culture is again lifted which has resulted into more number of prawn farms. The seashore and the dwelling places are getting polluted wherein the water is also becoming scarce. The brackish water bays have been encroached by the private farms and therefore, the number of women who were doing fishing by hands were also diminishing as there is no access or the water has become polluted leaving no fisheries resources.

In case of vegetable sellers, and petty shop keepers the petty shop keepers are much more affected as it is not possible for them to get a good margin due to increasing prices and emerging more number of competitive shops. Those who are able to procure from far away markets such as Tiruchirapalli, Pattukottai able to make reasonable margins to make the business viable.

**Hawkers/ Vendors:**

**MMDA Market, Chennai:**

The retail market at North-west Chennai was visited where many of the members of the WWF were doing their business. These women have their stalls established within the market place and surrounding area over the last 8-20 years. Interactions were made with them to know their business turnover, investments, price increases and the impact on their business. Two women selling dried fish, 2 vegetable sellers, a pot and curry leaf vendor and a masala powder seller were met and discussions were held.

The dried fish sellers said that the dried fish prices have increased by Rupees 5 per kg of dried fish over the last one year owing to hike in transportation prices, and low supplies. These women have increased their investments from rupees 7000 to 10000 per quarter of the year making a profit of rupees 2000 per consignment over a period of 3 months. The average sales has changed from rupees 400 to 550-600 per day resulting in profit of 100 rupees per day which goes for family consumption. Once the lot is over, then again they procure the fish and sell.

In case of a vegetable seller, the procurement cost per week has changed from 1000 to 2000 rupees however the profit margin remains the same of rupees 200 to 250 per day. The masala powder seller says that her everyday turnover has increased from Rupees 250 to 550 resulting in the same profit margin of rupees 100 per day. A green leaf seller said that she has to pay 10000/- advance to a gardener and get a supply of green leaves worth of 250 per day last year and got a profit of 100 rupees a day. Now the procurement prices for the same stock is 400 per day leaving behind a margin of 100 per day.

From the above market information and further discussions in Dindigal and Ahiramapattinam it is clear that the prices of agricultural produces are going up considerably at procurement point yielding a low revenue for the women. This is attributed to low supplies and increased competitions besides raising prices. However at Chennai, the women do not perceive any losses as they are assured of the minimum
profit margins which they were earning earlier. Also it is evident that these women do not know to calculate the cost benefit ratios. When it comes to pricing except those women who are dealing in the market places, other women cannot afford to increase the sale price as the consumers are from poorer sections as they sell from their dwelling places or act as a street vendors.

The saree business seems to be flourishing due to the impact of liberalization policy of the Governments where about 250 garment items are being imported and the prices of the locally made textiles are in the downtrend and therefore the whole sale prices of these textiles are cheaper for our women. As the women stated that earlier, the price of a saree will be costing them rupees 150 which could be saleable to 200 per saree. Now the prices are 75-100 which could be saleable to 150-250 per saree which makes the business more lucrative.

More women are engaging themselves in this business at Chennai when compared to the districts rural areas due to proximity to wholesale traders who buys from textile industries directly.

4.5 CONSTRAINTS IN THE CREDIT PROGRAMME IMPLEMENTATION:

The major problems related to non repayment of loans are due to seasonal variations, business losses, migration, sickness of spouses, misuse of money collected by leaders for emergency purposes, need to spend for other social needs including spending on the education of children.

In case of fishing, there is lack of availability of diesel, and ban on fishing for 45 days which lead to non-repayment.

In case of roofing materials made out of coconut leaves, the lean season is the period when it is rainy as well people need more roofing to be made. But the quality of the materials cannot be maintained. Therefore, there will be less business which leads to poor repayment. This happens at least three months in a year.

The rainy seasons affects both toy making and agarbathi rollers. In case of agarbathi rollers, both men and women are affected by bronchitis and tuberculosis. The women will have to spend most part of their income towards the medical expenses of their husbands.

The hawkers and vendors selling in the street or pavement are affected by bribes being asked by the police personnel. This affects in turn the repayments.

The toy makers are affected during the rainy seasons as it would not be possible for them to prepare the wood for carving.

The weavers are also affected by rainy seasons due to the living and working conditions wherein their looms get wet when it rains heavily.

The lace makers have their business only for six months in a year starting from November to February and rest of the year do not get much of orders from middlemen.
In general, women are able to make decisions with regard to spending their incomes. However, they are forced to give pocket money to their husbands towards their drinking habits.

In case of not able to meet the demand for repayments, then the women withdraw their savings made with ICNW and repay the amounts in time. In some locations, the women expressed that the rate of interest charged by WWF can be reduced.

4.6 THE INDICATORS USED IN PROBLEM IDENTIFICATION AND IMPACT MEASUREMENT:

The main indicators used in identification of group are
Poverty
Desertion
Exploitation by money lenders/ middlemen
Involvement in a business
Interest to start a business
In case of Bangalore region, at Channapatna, the Organisers stated that one more indicator is ownership of a house as most of them are migrant labour. When a question was raised as to whether this would mean that they end up in selecting rich women, then the criteria mentioned was that they would want at least the leader to have own house such that there will be any failure to get back loans without fail.

The visible impacts as seen by them were increase in income, reduction in the rate of interest (560% to 18% per annum) and the life insurance which the women’s families receive now. The increment in income helps women in investing the money in the education of their children, employment, daughters marriage etc. Women also help other women in distress. Some of the men have been refined from giving up drinking habit.

In the experiences of many women, they have lived the life of their daughters, sons, husband and parents on their own earning their livelihood. This is also a situation of stereotyping the role of Indian womanhood that she is been glorified for sacrifice. When the question was raised on this particular issue, most of the women members, organisers, and staff members admitted the fact that it had been their experience throughout their life time. Some of them had realized in their late years, that they have not thought about the security for themselves. The question of control over resources remains to be answered with regard to the control over the benefits by these women.  

23 It was told in 1996 that in the gender awareness training women are taught not to give one rupee of their loan to their husbands or male relatives in order to have access and control over their own money. If this is still part of the training programme in 2001 is not known.
SECTION C

5. TRAINING, RESEARCH AND PARTNERSHIP

5.1 TRAINING AND TRAINERS

The WWF’s experience shows that training is an effective strategy to develop poor women into a rich human resource. The character of the training can be sketched as follows. The unique feature of the training is that, it is not a concept to the educated few, but in effect by-passes the barriers of illiteracy. As a participatory effort, the training is more of a learning and sharing experience between the trainer and the trainee (this counts also for the partnership training). For the women of the credit groups it serves as a reminder of their similar backgrounds, all having gone through struggles of the same nature, with the aim to establish solidarity. The training pursues to lead to increased self-perception, enhanced awareness and tries to help devise strategies to combat oppression in their day to day survival.

The WWF facilitates ‘Material Development Workshop’ among its trainers, health workers, field supervisors, organisers, leaders and members of WWF to provide an opportunity for the grassroots women leaders of the Forum to interact with each other, bring out the culture/area specific issues affecting their lives.

In several branches we were able to get an explanation and demonstration of the visuals used for gender training, which is part of the one-day training for credit groups but is also used in other training sessions. The forum conducts one day training from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. on various issues such as: education of female child, female infanticide, health issues, superstitions, ceremonies, leadership qualities, responsible head of household. In all the above, the subjugation of women in society were highlighted and the role of women among the poor households were made to realize. The women were sensitized to recognize their own roles as a head of household responsible for the family and to be independent. Thus, the women were made to realize that they are the heads of households as they are responsible and assert their rights within their households. The intention is to change the traditional view that only men can be head of households. The husbands in the families were portrayed as drunkards, gamblers and not responsible for the household and abusing women. One mission member states that,

“there were no discussions held on how to change their husbands attitudes in these programmes’. Women are taking up more productive roles, asserting their rights within the households, responsible for the livelihood of their children. The women’s empowerment could start with this kind of approach, (women in development by making the women to be more efficient) but should lead to positive gender relations. Though in many cases cited it is happening as an outcome, nevertheless, it is not been facilitated. The tackling of drinking habit of men remains unchanged as women consider it as a kind of fate, which cannot be changed. When asked, whether efforts could be made from their side, women stated, that whenever, there is a wife abuse, women will have to tolerate at silence, or sometimes the neighbourhood women would go and advise the men not to do so. Rarely, complaints are made with police. However, at large this issue remains to be addressed.

In case of Dindigal, 50% of women said that any discussions or dialogue with men on their drinking habit would lead to more domestic violence, the rest of 50% mentioned that it is possible to have a discussion by the WWF and the men will listen. In case of Adhirampattinam and Chennai the women said that if they try to take up the issue on their own then the problem arises and if it is intervened by WWF, then there will not be any problem. The women suggested to have (Adhirampattinam) multiple approaches namely, to struggle against the sale of liquor through the
Union as well taking necessary steps within their families by the women themselves and through WWF by initiating a dialogue with men. In case of Andhra Pradesh, the subjugation of women is much more with many women suffering due to dowry issue. Also it is recommended that educating men at this stage of intervention would lead to a better gender balance at the household and community levels.

A trainer in the branch office told another mission member, that a lively discussion on behaviour of men, alcoholism and its implications for the survival of the household is considered as a self-evident part of the one-day training. Moreover, the issue is addressed by numerous informal meetings and talks with the visiting organizer and area leaders.

WWF also recognizes the training needs are very different in the social cultural contexts of the country. Consequently, training programmes have been tailored to suit the areas specific needs of the participants and is highly flexible and adaptive in nature. This was illustrated by the chart on 'Obstacles for Women in Development', Cultural Myths and Barriers. The chart asks the question, 'what is the tradition that oppresses women?' This shows that the charts are adjusted to the local community. It seems that the training programmes are not only using classroom training but also use methods of the non-verbal training methodologies such as role plays, skits, puppet shows, games, exercises, participatory workshops, seminars and camps.

The forum is having linkages with Gandhigram, NISIET for training on rural low cost technologies. It has collaborated with NIRD for the Leadership and Public speaking training programme.

The following improvements in training were observed by the mission during the past 5 years:

- more trainers for the training of credit members have been appointed (see above)
- the teaching material/visuals are upgraded and modernised (including the specific occupational/branch gender visuals)
- a nice and clear training manual for trainers has been produced and is used in all the branches by the local trainers.
- for each new loan the women get one day formal training (five years ago only two times). The second training has a focus on occupational health.

Although much have been done, the mission recommends the following types of training to improve the work

- Economic-, Skill- and Occupational training for trainers, organisers, members of credit groups

It was still found that the economic awareness and knowledge on the feasibility and viability of micro entrepreneurial activities of the credit group members and the organisers can be improved. The women are to be trained on cost-benefit of their trades such that they are able to estimate the risks as well the real profits. Although there is counselling on the subject by the bank field officer and in the credit group training, it is felt that the trainers/organisers should be upgraded in their knowledge. We suggest to invite specialist from a training Institute and to organise an extra day training for leaders and members of credit groups.
- Improvement of gender and development and social analysis training, in particular on gender relations, the role of women and the responsibilities of men (alcoholism).

This has been discussed in the previous.

- Continuation of the training in 'alternative livelihood' in vellore and replication in other branches.

- Study-tours

It is recommended to support study-tours for ICNW and Forum field and office staff to other national and international successful organisations or programmes related to the work of the Forum. The exposure to wider horizons might raise new inspiration and ideas for the diversification of income generating activities, management and financial skills, and other types of trade-union action that might be taken up.

- More training for trade-union staff

In view of the still existing feudal labour relations (pledging, patronage, middle men) and capitalist exploitation found in all the branches, it is strongly recommended to support the trade-union staff with all ways and means. Dutch embassy might send an trade-union expert to investigate the needs of the WWF trade-union staff.

- Linkages to Government resources

It is the opinion of the evaluation team that the WWF should give more effort to link up with Government programmes and resources. In the credit programme there are not many links to the outside world. In order to assist the process of diversification of income generating and to mediate in obtaining resources from Government programmes more linkages with all kinds of Government Departments might be pursued which might assist in training.

- Advocacy

Moreover, the question can be raised, how far the WWF organisers and trainers have sufficient knowledge to fulfil an advocacy role? As we saw even rape and murder cases are not reported at the police and the criminals not punished. To take up a real advocacy role implies that the WWF should have an in-house qualified lawyer, and has access to the judicature. The WWF itself is still thinking of appointing one person in each branch to take on the responsibilities of advocacy, and the strengthening overall external linkages in order to negotiate at their respective district and state levels. These initiatives should be supported as much as possible. Currently, these issues are dealt with by the grassroots women, when their efforts fail the cases are brought to the attention of the head office to lobby with the state government.

5.2 RESEARCH AND MONITORING

Research undertaken by WWF since 1990.
1992 Research on status of housing among the members of WWF.
1992 Feasibility study at Jamshedpur towards initiation of Friendship programme.
1993 Feasibility study at Bellary for the initiation WWF's branch.
1993 Feasibility study at Dharmapuri towards initiation of WWF’s branch.
1994 Feasibility study towards initiation of Health programme at Bellary and Anantapur.
1994 Research on incidence of female infanticide at Dharmapuri.
1994 Participatory Research on the impact of WWF’s friendship programme in Orissa.
1995 Study on the impact of credit programme among the members of WWF.
1996 Study on the conditions of women workers in the Leather Industry in Madras city.
1996 Impact study on social; Economic and attitudinal changes among WWF members.

In 2001 an impact study has been conducted among 2350 members spread across 15 branches living in 714 areas. Data was collected through interviews using structured questionnaires by trained grassroots investigators. The 'before-and-after' methodology was followed. The study presents much interesting data but improvements have to be made. (see also suggestions in Findings)

Other suggestion for studies are to investigate:

- ‘the situation of debt-bondage among the Women Silk Weavers of Kanchipuram town in Tamil Nadu State of India’. An excellent research proposal has been drawn up by Sri Vydhia Rajagopal, co-ordinator at the head office in Madras.

- the impact of alcoholism on the living conditions of women in rural and urban areas, and the male dominance in loan supported productive activities in rural areas.


5.3 LINKAGES AND PARTNERSHIP NETWORKS, TRAINING CENTRE

WWF has built a wide network around her in transferring skills and experience to many national and international NGO’s and Government staff members (see: publication on training and orientation programs at WWF). To give some examples:

A team of women from Kalakar Trust an organization working among women artisans of Katputli Colony, New Delhi were trained to enable them to start a savings cum credit society on the model of WWF. The team was impressed with the merits of grassroots leadership, their initiative and their contribution towards sustained development.

The Women/Development Division, Government of Nepal deputed a team of fifteen government functionaries from the Ministry of Rural Development/Women from the various districts of Nepal for an orientation in various training methodologies such as family welfare and rural development and credit assistance programmes of the Forum. They visited various branches of WWF apart from the classroom orientation to learn WWF’s grassroots methodology.

WWF imparted training and orientation to five senior Lao Women’s Union members from Vientiane Laos on Credit, Income Generation and Family Welfare activities. Moreover more leaders from Gram Panchayats in India itself come for training by the WWF.

24 Detailed comments on the study cannot be made in this report but will be communicated to the Forum in a later stage.
In view of the above sketched implications of NEP and globalisation resulting in an increased feminisation of poverty it can be expected that more potential partners for training will knock at the door of the WWF. The mission considers this as a very relevant activity in which not only training but also the infrastructure has to be created that trained groups and organisations can learn and apply the empowerment methodology of the WWF in their own practice. The role of the WWF in hosting the study teams does not confine to mere sharing of experiences and imparting information, but also in accommodating their travel logistics, boarding and other hospitalities. The intake is hampered due to lack of space for training and accommodation. The organisation of the course modules and 'feedback study' programmes requires a lot of work and energy. The establishment of a training department equipped with an adequate infrastructure will greatly enhance the output of the partnership training. Under the condition that follow-ups are part and parcel of the partnership the mission supports the funding for the establishment of such a training department in/near the head office.

The mission want to emphasize the utmost importance of the replication of the 'leading role model' by other NGO's, government institutions and other projects that are related to survival and empowerment strategies of the poor.

Therefore, the functioning of the WWF, as a nodal office for donor support for partnership organisation is wholeheartedly supported by the mission under the condition that a special training department with qualified staff will look after the work. A new training centre will be necessary in this pursuit. Land and (old) building, adjacent to the head office has been acquired for that purpose. More funds will be necessary to renovate/reconstruct the new training centre.

This is also necessary as the current building of the head office is overcrowded. It is daily visited by hundreds of women depositing their repayment (first floor). Organisers have many meetings and duties in the main office. All the training are conducted in the same rooms (second floor) and an expansion and intensification of regular training is foreseen. Moreover, annual reports show an impressive number of visitors coming to the Forum.
SECTION D

6. INTERNAL REVIEW AND FINANCIAL VIABILITY

6.1 STRUCTURE AND FINANCIAL OPERATIONS

Before looking at the financial operations of the programme, it is important to understand the structure of the organization.

Organisational Structure

The primary organization is Working Women’s Forum (WWF). It is registered as a society under Tamilnadu Societies Registration Act, 1975. This organization mainly interfaces with the donors and outside agencies. It also designs and implements programs and activities for women and children, which are funded mainly through grants. WWF has formed two specialized organizations: ICNW and NUWW. ICNW (Indian Cooperative Network for Women Limited) is a specialized organization, functioning as a credit-cooperative and bank. It is registered as a cooperative society under Multi-state Cooperative Societies Act, 1984. ICNW receives donor funds through WWF to launch a credit program. It does not interface with outside agencies. National Union for Working Women is registered as a Trade Union under the Trade Unions Act, 1926. It receives a limited amount of funds as membership fees. Most of the operating costs for NUWW are met from these funds.

All three organisations are closely interconnected – all three have the same leadership, occupy the same office space and use the same support staff. In practise, it is impossible to segregate the three programmatically. However, NUWW is not involved financially in the credit program. Our review mainly focused on WWF and ICNW only.

History

Netherlands Government started supporting this program in 1987. Initially, Dutch funds were the only source of funds for this program. However, later on, particularly since 1997, other donors have also contributed funds, mainly through loans. One of the key donors has been Rabobank Foundation, also from Netherlands. Apart from these, SIDBI funds have also been significant in recent years.

Total funds available for the credit program are summarised in a later section under the heading ‘Credit Performance: Revolving Fund’.

Financial overview

The entire grant / loan funds are initially received at WWF. WWF retains the part related to operating expenses. Funds meant as capital for the credit program are passed on to ICNW as a loan. ICNW then revolves this money among the women through its urban and rural branches.

ICNW also issues shares to its members and receives money against these. Currently, these funds add up to Rs.2.05 crores. Additionally, ICNW has saving and term deposits from its members, which amount to Rs.1.57 crores.

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25 It has not been possible to summarize the total grants (for expenses as also revolving fund). The summary, therefore, shows only the funds available as revolving fund.

26 31-Mar-01

27 1 crore = 1,00,00,000 (10 millions)
ICNW pays WWF interest @ 10% on the funds received as capital. It also pays interest to its members @ 7% on savings and @ 8-11% on term deposits. Apart from these financial expenses, its operating expenses are very low at Rs.43 lacs\(^{28}\) p.a. The operating expenses mainly include salary for bank assistants, rent, stationery and some minor administrative expenses. Salary for other staff (organisers, trainers, bank management etc.) is absorbed at WWF. This is being currently met through the Netherlands grant.

ICNW receives interest on the loans (given to members) @ 18% p.a. on declining balance. This rate has remained the same since the beginning. It also receives share-processing charges from active members.

The active members also pay annual membership fees of Rs.24. This fee is normally paid when they come for the next loan. The entire amount is deposited directly in WWF (Rs.12) and NUWW (Rs.12) bank accounts.

\(^{28}\) 1 lac = 100,000 (one hundred thousand)
6.2 CREDIT PERFORMANCE

WWF has put in a very impressive performance in the last 20 years. This can be assessed from the following:

- ICNW had 1.41 lac shareholders on 31-Mar-98. It had raised Rs. 1.02 crores as share capital from these members. Additionally, their savings amounted to Rs.51 lacs.
- From 1981 to 1998, it had disbursed 5.12 lac loans aggregating Rs.28.44 crores to 1.40 lac members. Average size of a loan was Rs.555. Outstanding balance of loans came to Rs.3.7 crores.
- Over the next three years (1998-2001), it doubled its shareholders to 2.80 lacs. It raised another Rs. 1.03 crores from them as share capital. Savings tripled to Rs.1.57 crores.
- From 1998 to 2001, it had disbursed another 3.36 lac loans aggregating Rs.30.48 crores. Average size of a loan was Rs.906. Outstanding balance of loans increased to Rs.7.26 crores.
- This amount of Rs.7.26 crores was due from 127,845 members. This means about 46% of the shareholders are actively involved in the credit program.

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29 Some of the figures have been taken from audited accounts, and others from internal reports. There are some variations between the two.
30 31-Mar-98
31 Number of members on 31-3-98
32 1-Apr-98
Repayment Rate

Despite such a large operation, recovery rate against these unsecured loans has been very high. As much as 98.75% of the total amount due for 1981-2001 has been collected. During the recent period also, the rate remains high: 98.55% of the amount demanded between Apr-99 to Sep-01 was collected.

The above recovery rate is a useful indicator, but it must be carefully understood. The rate depends on the term of the loan. A short-term loan means that the money is rotated more often – this shows up in a higher rate of recovery. This can be appreciated with a simple example:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Bank A</th>
<th>Bank B</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Capital in 1981</strong></td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Loan term</strong></td>
<td>10 years</td>
<td>1 year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Loans given over 1981-2001</strong></td>
<td>200</td>
<td>2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Recovery over 1981-2001</strong></td>
<td>150</td>
<td>1950</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Net capital in 2001</strong></td>
<td>50</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Recovery rate</strong></td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>97.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

However, it can be seen that in both the situations, the banks in above example have lost 50% of their capital.

It can also be seen that using a cumulative recovery indicator can lead to wrong decisions. This may happen because the cumulative figures become large and tend to distort the current performance. The following table shows this effect through an illustration based on WWF figures:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(Rs. In lacs)</th>
<th>99-00</th>
<th>00-01</th>
<th>Apr-Sep’01</th>
<th>99-Sep’01</th>
<th>81-Sep’01</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Overdue</strong></td>
<td>37.74</td>
<td>45.70</td>
<td>83.50</td>
<td>37.74</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Add: Fresh demand</strong></td>
<td>860.11</td>
<td>961.72</td>
<td>658.62</td>
<td>2480.45</td>
<td>5789.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>897.85</td>
<td>1007.42</td>
<td>742.12</td>
<td>2518.19</td>
<td>5789.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Less: collected</strong></td>
<td>852.15</td>
<td>923.92</td>
<td>669.54</td>
<td>2445.61</td>
<td>5717.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Balance overdue</strong></td>
<td>45.70</td>
<td>83.50</td>
<td>72.58</td>
<td>72.58</td>
<td>72.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Recovery %</strong></td>
<td>94.91%</td>
<td>91.71%</td>
<td>90.22%</td>
<td>97.12%</td>
<td>98.75%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

WWF uses a simple method to arrive at the figure for demand. This is done by adding the figure of overdue loans to the figure for collection during the period. The above table also shows another feature: some loans may not get collected in time, but eventually the money comes in. However, during the time that the loans remain overdue, these are treated as ‘non-performing assets’. These loans do not yield interest, but tie up valuable capital.

Arrears Situation

As at 31-March-01, 16.47% of ICNW loans were overdue or doubtful. This comes to Rs.1.20 crores. Out of these, ICNW has already made a provision for the 5% segment (Rs.36.55 lacs), which is doubtful of recovery.

The proportion of arrears to total loan outstanding is shown below:

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33 Recovery rate is calculated on the basis of amount due. This figure is for the entire period of 20 years upto 30-Sep-01.
34 We have added overdue figures, as recovery is included in the ‘Collection’ figures. In practice, recovery against overdue balances can be tracked separately, for a clearer picture.
Arrears at ICNW (Mar'96 to Mar'01)

As the chart is a percentage chart, it shows that the proportion of overdue / doubtful loans is rising over the years. This could be due to increased availability of funds, and psychological pressure on the bank to increase utilisation of funds (see last row of table). This normally leads to higher loan default as quality of group formation and training may suffer under pressure to disburse.

The data used for the above chart comes from audited ICNW accounts and is tabulated below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>All in %</th>
<th>Mar-96</th>
<th>Mar-97</th>
<th>Mar-98</th>
<th>Mar-99</th>
<th>Mar-00</th>
<th>Mar-01</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Doubtful</td>
<td>3.93</td>
<td>3.87</td>
<td>3.21</td>
<td>3.87</td>
<td>2.66</td>
<td>5.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overdue</td>
<td>5.90</td>
<td>7.26</td>
<td>5.82</td>
<td>5.15</td>
<td>7.34</td>
<td>11.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good</td>
<td>90.17</td>
<td>88.87</td>
<td>90.97</td>
<td>90.98</td>
<td>90.00</td>
<td>83.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100.00</td>
<td>100.00</td>
<td>100.00</td>
<td>100.00</td>
<td>100.00</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funds utilisation</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Revolving Fund

How much is the total revolving fund in the credit programme today? As discussed earlier, this fund is with ICNW. As on 30th September 2001, it added up to Rs.673 lacs. Following charts show the distribution / composition of this fund (All figures in Rs. Lacs):
The above charts give us several additional insights into the revolving fund:

- Bulk (82.3%) of the revolving fund of Rs. 6.73 crores has been released to the branches.
- Operations in Tamilnadu are the most significant financially – 56% of the funds are in Tamilnadu. Karnataka is yet to take off, with only about 17% funds being managed by Karnataka branches.
- Over 88% of the fund has come from three sources: Netherlands Govt., Rabobank Foundation and SIDBI. However, WWF has also resourced some money from other sources, including Sida, Ford Foundation, IGSSS and Appropriate Technology International. If need be, these openings can be explored further.
- Less than half (46%) of the fund is grant-based. Balance is in the form of loans. These loans will be repaid in eight instalments starting from Nov-01. This may either result in a more tight and efficient operation or may reduce outreach. As an alternative, WWF may replace these funds with other funds.
- WWF pays interest at 6-10% on the loan funds it has resourced. Compared to this, the grant funds appear to be free. However, these are not really so. Inflation eats into these at about 6-10% a year. On the other hand, the inflation loss on loan funds is absorbed by the loaning bank (SIDBI or Rabo).
- Not all the money released to branches is loaned out to the women. If the demand is slack, then surplus funds are held as term deposits in local banks. From a financial point of view, this earns less interest but is more prudent than ‘hard-selling’ loans to women during months when they don’t need the money.

At this stage it is also useful to take a look at how efficiently this money is utilised. From a financial point of view, the revolving fund cannot be kept in a separate compartment. In the following table, therefore, we compare the total funds available with the amount of loans given out. It must be kept in mind that total funds available include other funds such as share capital, deposits received etc.:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sources of funds</th>
<th>31-03-96</th>
<th>31-03-97</th>
<th>31-03-98</th>
<th>31-03-99</th>
<th>31-03-00</th>
<th>31-03-01</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Member funds</td>
<td>91.18</td>
<td>112.28</td>
<td>154.26</td>
<td>209.47</td>
<td>276.75</td>
<td>362.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Borrowings</td>
<td>179.26</td>
<td>233.28</td>
<td>261.60</td>
<td>277.72</td>
<td>448.11</td>
<td>630.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internal accruals</td>
<td>12.71</td>
<td>19.58</td>
<td>26.00</td>
<td>39.91</td>
<td>47.75</td>
<td>78.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Funds available</td>
<td>283.15</td>
<td>365.14</td>
<td>441.86</td>
<td>527.10</td>
<td>772.61</td>
<td>1,071.09</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Application of funds</th>
<th>31-03-96</th>
<th>31-03-97</th>
<th>31-03-98</th>
<th>31-03-99</th>
<th>31-03-00</th>
<th>31-03-01</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Loans to members</td>
<td>233.53</td>
<td>302.77</td>
<td>373.60</td>
<td>463.81</td>
<td>602.78</td>
<td>726.45</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
We can see that from 1996 till 1999, the cash and bank balances\(^{35}\) hovered around 10% of the total funds available. Such balances are required for a smooth operating cash flow. In our opinion, this indicates good cash management\(^{36}\). Percentage of funds deployed (as loans to members) also rose consistently from 1996 through 1999. In 1999, it went up to 88%, which indicates a very tight position indeed. However, we see this trend reverse itself suddenly from 2000 onwards. Surplus bank balances show an increasing trend, with a corresponding drop in percent funds deployed. In 2001, only 68% of the available funds have been loaned out. Does this indicate poor financial management in last two years? The answer is both ‘no’ and ‘yes’. It is good that ICNW has not succumbed to the temptation of simply ‘pushing’ the money onwards to the women. Such unnecessary loans would have increased the default rate. In this respect, ICNW has shown good financial management and mature judgement. However, on the other hand, ICNW appears to have borrowed more money than can be absorbed by the area. This probably does not have any direct implication\(^{37}\) for ICNW’s balance sheet.

### Operating Expenses

Operating expenses of the credit program are incurred at WWF, ICNW as also the NUWW. To get a true picture of the operating expenses, one needs to look at all three. Operating expenses are, therefore, discussed in detail under the next heading ‘Self-sufficiency: The position in 2000-01’.

### 6.3 SELF-SUFFICIENCY

Is the program financially self-sufficient? If not, can it become self-sufficient in the near future? We examined this aspect\(^{38}\) in detail.

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35 Term deposits made with banks are included as bank balances.
36 We have not compared these figures with commercial banks, as their operating environment is different.
37 It was earning about the same interest on its deposits (10-11%), as it paid out on the SIDBI loan (12%). On the other hand, it is possible to argue that these funds could have become available to other priority areas, had these not been loaned to WWF.
38 Self-sufficiency was first evaluated for the entire credit program. In view of the findings for the credit program as a whole, unit-wise self-sufficiency was not examined.
The position in 2000-01

The audited Profit & Loss Account of ICNW for 2000-01 shows a profit of Rs.10.41 lacs. However, this may not show the true profitability of the credit program as substantial operating expenses are met at WWF (with Netherlands grant) and at NUWW with other grants / funds. Discussions with the WWF team\(^{39}\) show that all the staff at the branches and at head office is essential to the credit program. Specifically, the credit program cannot be run without the organisers, trainers, managers and support staff. Salaries of these persons are presently accounted at WWF and NUWW.

The following is a restructured Profit & Loss Account of ICNW for 2000-01:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Audited (Rs. Lacs)</th>
<th>Restructured (Rs. Lacs)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Income:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interest from members</td>
<td>100.38</td>
<td>100.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Member entrance fees</td>
<td>2.23</td>
<td>2.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interest from banks</td>
<td>24.45</td>
<td>24.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other income</td>
<td>4.96</td>
<td>4.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Membership fees (WWF / NUWW)</td>
<td></td>
<td>23.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>132.02</td>
<td>155.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Expenses:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Expenses at ICNW:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interest to WWF</td>
<td>52.25</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interest SIDBI / Rabo</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>31.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interest to members</td>
<td>5.75</td>
<td>5.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICNW salaries, rent(^{40}), overheads etc.</td>
<td>43.15</td>
<td>43.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provision for bad / doubtful loans</td>
<td>20.46</td>
<td>20.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Expenses at WWF:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salaries</td>
<td>30.10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training and travel</td>
<td>25.84</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>35.48</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Expenses at NUWW:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salaries</td>
<td>6.22</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training and travel</td>
<td>1.76</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>3.13</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total expenses</strong></td>
<td>121.61</td>
<td>203.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Profit / loss</td>
<td>+10.41</td>
<td>-47.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Add: Inflation reserve @ 10% on capital (31-3-01)(^{41})</td>
<td></td>
<td>-27.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surplus / Deficit</td>
<td>+10.41</td>
<td>-75.76</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Notes:**

*The above does not provide for any dividend to the members of the cooperative. Further, the 18% rate of interest is likely to come under pressure from the clients\(^{42}\), as interest rates drop in the economy.*

\(^{39}\) Ms. Egammai, among others

\(^{40}\) The rent is paid by ICNW to WWF and is an internal transfer. However, we have not excluded it here, as rent is an operating expense.

\(^{41}\) This reserve has been calculated only on capital raised through grants. No reserve has been calculated on capital received through loans, as the inflation is absorbed by the loaning bank. No reserve has been calculated on capital raised through shares either.

\(^{42}\) During a visit to Dindigul branch, the women at Dharmathupatti voiced this on 30-Nov-01 during a group meeting. According to Ms. Kamila, mission member, this point also came up at some of
Provision for inflation is essential to protect the real value of the loan fund. Part of the interest rate (18%) is a cover against inflation, and must be set aside. In a low inflation economy, interest rates are much lower.

Projections for break-even point:
What is the point at which the credit program breaks even or becomes self-sufficient? The following table offers a scenario:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rs. Lacs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Current non-financial operating expenses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less: Current non-financial revenues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Net operating gap (A)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current rate of interest on client loans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less: Cost of funds (interest / inflation / dividend)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Net spread (B)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Required size of revolving fund (A/B)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interest spread on above revolving fund</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current revolving fund (actual loans)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gap in revolving fund</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The above should be treated only as an indication. For calculating break-even point, we need to understand and know how operating costs behave. For instance, to handle a larger fund of Rs. 15 crores, more staff will be needed. The operating expenses will go up. As a result, a larger revolving fund (say Rs. 18 crores) will be needed.

Options for reaching break-even
Can bringing in more money and increasing the revolving fund resolve this problem? This does not appear likely as the area is getting saturated with funds. ICNW is currently using only 68% of the available funds. Over the last three years, this ratio has been dropping by 10% each year from a peak of 88% on 31-Mar-99.

A second alternative would be to reduce operating expenses. However, this may not be feasible without drastically changing the program approach. In such a case, the basic purpose of the program may be defeated. There also appears to be little scope for economising, as the staff members are already paid relatively low salary.

A third option is looking at other sources of income. It should be noted that commercial banks do not survive on interest alone. They also have substantial income from other sources: money-market operations, equity markets, fees for banking services, insurance / fiduciary services, credit-card commission etc. However, these require substantial financial skills and would also draw away time and resources from the credit program.

The fourth option is to provide WWF with an endowment fund. However, such an endowment fund should generate an income of about Rs. 75 lacs per annum. The net yield on endowment investments is only 6%. This means that the endowment would
have to be as big as Rs.12.50 crores. It would make little financial sense to lock up such a large amount in corporate or government securities.

**Looking at the basic premise**

The above discussion also leads us to a more fundamental question: Can such a credit-program become financially self-sufficient? To answer this, let us look at the constraints:

1. The ceiling for rate of interest is determined by market forces, which tap the creamy layers. It is also determined by WWF’s need to offer credit at an equitable rate of interest.
2. Options for developing alternative sources for income are extremely limited or non-existent.
3. The program design calls for high operating costs (frequent interaction with clients, attention to donors / visitors, involvement in non-credit aspects, training inputs, etc.).

Given the above three factors, can an organisation like ICNW compete with a commercial bank and yet offer much wider service to its clients? The logic of market efficiency would not allow this.

Secondly, it appears that the WWF credit program is really an empowerment program. Credit is being used merely as a vehicle or an entry point. If so, can we expect the credit program to support all the operating expenses of the program? In effect, it would mean asking the micro-entrepreneurs to pay for the empowerment program as well.

**Conclusion**

Based on the foregoing, it is our assessment that, given the program design and the structure of financial markets, the WWF credit program cannot become financially self-sufficient at any time in foreseeable future. Further, in order to maintain its program focus, it would continue to require regular grant-based financial inputs.

**6.4 INTERNAL MONITORING AND EVALUATION**

There is no formal document, which describes the procedures for internal monitoring. The following is based on information collected during the visit:

**Day-to-day operations**

Most of the credit operations take place at 14 off-location branches. The branches have a formal structure, with a branch manager being responsible for the administration. The ICNW bank exists as a sub-set within the branch. There is a proper division of duties, for effective internal control. Further, the staff appears to be fairly competent and aware of the systems and procedures. It is possible, however, that a detailed systems review may identify some weaknesses.

The main Chennai office is also divided into three branches. Here the supervision and control systems are different, due to close proximity of the main office.

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47 At Dindigul, for instance, we observed that blank cheques are signed at Chennai and sent to the branch through a messenger, sometimes a bus-driver. A covering letter is also sent. These are recorded in a register and tracked. However, the procedure is fraught with risk and is against the basic principles of internal control.

48 In practice, this means three separate counters in the same hall.
A special cell called ‘monitoring cell’ has also been set up under Ms. Vasantha’s supervision. These people visit the branches periodically to review their functioning and records. Additionally, Ms. Rajeswari is responsible for looking after ‘particulars’49. The format for these reports is fairly detailed, comprehensive and follows an interlocking structure. These monthly reports are scrutinised and crosschecked regularly. All the bank staff we interacted with showed an excellent grasp of the relevant accounting / banking concepts as also appeared to have a clear understanding of their own responsibilities. A high degree of stability among staff also contributes to this.

Long Range Financial Management

WWF / ICNW allocates a large proportion of its time and attention to running the bank. Its daily operations are therefore running very well. However, during the discussions, we observed that relatively less attention was being paid to long-range financial management. Concepts related to this did not enter the discussion automatically. When these were brought up, the bank staff indicated that they were familiar with some of the terms, but not with the underlying concepts. Though they have all the figures and information on their fingertips, they were not familiar with a broad financial analysis of their own bank’s situation.

In our opinion, in the long run, and as the bank operations continue to grow, this can become a serious handicap.

Network with Financial Institutions

WWF has been working with Rabobank Foundation, Netherlands for a long time. Total loan repayable to Rabobank Foundation comes to Rs.1.59 crores. WWF is paying an interest of 6% per annum on this. However, Rabobank Foundation has dealt with WWF more as a donor than as a banker. This relationship cannot therefore really be considered as a banker-customer relationship. Apart from this, WWF has also successfully linked up with SIDBI50. Total loan repayable to SIDBI comes to Rs.2 crores. Interest on this is payable @ 12% per annum. In the past, WWF has also borrowed from NABARD51. However, this relationship is currently not active. Both these institutions were set up for priority-sector lending. Further both have a reputation for acting more like bankers and less like donor agencies. The above would show therefore that WWF is able to link up and negotiate with specialised banks as well. WWF has so far not attempted to link up the women directly with lending banks, as some other NGOs have done.

Reporting format

A specific task related to developing a reporting format for the revolving fund. Netherlands Embassy had earlier suggested a format, which had not been implemented successfully at WWF. During the visit, this format was discussed. It appears that ICNW was reporting number of loans against some of the lines, instead of reporting the values. Once this confusion was cleared up, they were able to prepare the report successfully. This report is for Phase III only, as they do not have this information available in a ready format for earlier phases.

The report prepared by ICNW is reproduced below:

49 Details and reports received from the branches
50 Small Industries Development Bank of India
51 National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(Amounts in Rupees)</th>
<th>As at 31-Dec-99</th>
<th>As at 30-Jun-00</th>
<th>As at 31-Dec-00</th>
<th>As at 30-Jun-01</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Revolving fund Grant received so far</td>
<td>20,00,000</td>
<td>40,00,000</td>
<td>60,00,000</td>
<td>80,00,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Utilization of This Grant:**

| Opening Balance of Beneficiary Loans | 0 | 20,09,280 | 30,94,000 | 77,45,169 |
| Add: Fresh loans given out in this period | 24,54,600 | 25,96,400 | 70,69,200 | 45,85,800 |
| **Total** | 24,54,600 | 46,05,680 | 1,01,63,200 | 1,23,30,969 |
| Less: Recovery of Loans in this period | 4,45,320 | 15,11,680 | 24,18,031 | 57,25,400 |
| Balance of Beneficiary Loans | 20,09,280 | 30,94,000 | 77,45,169 | 66,05,569 |
| Less: Loans written off as irrecoverable | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| **Final Balance of Beneficiary Loans** | 20,09,280 | 30,94,000 | 77,45,169 | 66,05,569 |

Ms. Rajeswari has confirmed that ICNW will be able to prepare this report in future also.

**Training Centre**

According to page 35 of the project document for the Netherlands grant for phase III, WWF budgeted Rs.80,00,000 for building a training centre in Chennai. Of the total amount, 50% was to be borne by Rabobank Foundation and 50% by the Netherlands Government.

For this purpose, WWF purchased a plot with a residential building next door for a total sum of Rs.82,49,040 in financial year 1999-2000. This building is being used to conduct trainings for the time being. However, the building is not suitable for use as a training centre as the rooms are small. WWF plans to knock this down and erect another building. Designs for this have been prepared by the architects. However, it is not confirmed when the construction will commence.

It may be noted that the total budget of Rs.80,00,000 was for the land as also the building. However, the entire amount has gone into purchase of land itself. WWF has stated that the building will be constructed from WWF’s own resources. However, it is possible that WWF may also be trying to raise funds for the building from other sources – that may also explain the delay in starting construction.

**Review of financial claim**

A specific task related to review of one of the six-monthly financial claims submitted by WWF to the Embassy for reimbursement covering the period 1/7/2000 to 30/6/2001. However, it was felt by us that the time available would not be sufficient to complete this task in a satisfactory manner, in view of the volume of transactions and the bookkeeping system.

This was discussed with the Embassy. The Embassy agreed that this task could be dropped from the present terms of Reference. Accordingly, the reimbursement claim was not reviewed.
6.5 OTHER ISSUES

Other issues that were reviewed or came up during the visit are summarised below. Some of these were covered on the request of Ms. Joke Muylwijk made during the initial briefing:

Links with other donor programs
WWF accounts show that it receives an annual grant from CAF, Virginia (USA). In 2000-01, this amounted to Rs.26.62 lacs. Citibank has also contributed some funds to this project. It is not clear what this project relates to. Apart from this, WWF also runs a destitute home. There do not appear to be any other significant programs with ICNW or WWF. There are no apparent links or overlap of the credit program with other donor-supported programs.

Using special terms
It has been pointed out that WWF team uses several terms, which have a non-standard meaning. Also, the same term is sometimes used in a different context, but without a qualification. This causes problems in communicating with the outsiders. One such term is ‘member’. Another instance is ‘particulars’. Similarly, terms such as ‘outstanding’ etc. have special definitions, which are not obvious to outsiders. A schedule of ‘Sundry Creditors’ has been marked as ‘due by’ – this phrase would normally be ‘due to’. A monthly report from ICNW branches is called ‘Receipts and Charges Statement’ – it actually shows all the receipts and payments. It is felt that such special usage has developed mainly due to the fact that WWF team does not often mix with their peers in other organisations. This can be remedied by attending training programs as also by arranging exposure tours.

Membership
As observed under the previous heading, the term ‘member’ is not quite clear. WWF has stated that it has 7,03,683 members as on 30-Sep-01. Each member is supposed to pay an annual membership fee of Rs. 12. At this rate, WWF should have received around Rs. 80,00,000 as membership fee in 2000-01. However, its accounts show only Rs.11,80,644 as membership receipts in 2000-01. This would mean that about 100,000 members only paid their fees. A second source of this figure could be the number of ICNW shareholders. On 30th September 2001, this was reported to be 294,199. Are all these shareholders active? For an answer we turn to ICNW accounts for 2000-01. ICNW accounts for 2000-01 contain a schedule marked J, giving details of loans. This schedule shows that 96,610 loans were issued during the year. Also at the end of the year, 127,845 loans were outstanding. This figure ties up closely with the members who are paying their annual fees to WWF. On the basis of the above, we estimate that WWF / ICNW have an active membership base of around 100,000 women.

52 The fee is collected at the time the loan is disbursed to the members.
**Book-keeping systems**

It was mentioned during the initial briefing that the ICNW bookkeeping systems appear to be complicated and difficult to understand. We, therefore, looked briefly at the systems and also discussed these with the staff at ICNW. It is correct that each transaction is often recorded several times in the books and it may be possible to simplify or cut down the number of entries / books. However, the reason for this appears to be that ICNW is a bank, dealing mainly with cash. In bank operations, it is common to set up interlocking mirror books for better internal control. Simplifying these may reduce the work but would also lead to weakened controls. Further, the ICNW staff appears to be quite clear about the bookkeeping systems. Also, ICNW is now in the process of computerising its accounting systems. It is likely that if there is any unnecessary duplication in the bookkeeping systems will be eliminated during this process.

In our opinion, therefore, there appears to be no requirement to modify the bookkeeping systems at ICNW at present.

**Network-funding**

During the debriefing, we were also asked to look at network funding as an option for WWF.

It is our view that WWF is an organisation good at designing and implementing programs directly. It has also been successful, as it has built up a high degree of trust and team spirit among its team, who often act more like a family than a formal organisation. They also appear to prefer a direct hands-on approach. Further, it has limited formal communication or networking skills. An indication of this is available in its past experience – its efforts in Uttar Pradesh and Orissa, initiated through networks, have not taken off so far.

Secondly, funding a network through WWF would mean that WWF would have to take on responsibilities of approving and monitoring grants. This requires substantial effort if it is to be executed properly. The profile of staff required for this role is also different from that of the present WWF team.

It is our suggestion, therefore, that if the Netherlands Embassy and WWF wish to explore this avenue, then they may wish to consider setting up a new organisation linked to WWF, and exclusively devoted to expanding / ‘franchising’ the credit program.

**6.6 INCIDENTAL OBSERVATIONS**

- Funds received by WWF from the Netherlands Embassy are treated as foreign contribution under Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act, 1976. These cannot be passed on / loaned to any other non-profit, if it also does not have FCRA registration or permission. WWF is presently passing on FC funds to ICNW. ICNW should therefore get FCRA registration.
- The Endowment fund at WWF has not been set up according to Netherlands proposal for phase III. WWF needs further inputs on understanding endowment management.
- Loans given to ICNW\(^{53}\) from WWF are not being shown in the WWF Balance Sheet as at 31-Mar-01 (or prior years). As these are very large sums, this raises questions about the quality of external audit carried out at WWF.

\(^{53}\) These add up to Rs.6.30 crores.
Recommendation beyond 2004

As indicated earlier, a credit program such as this cannot become self-sufficient in the foreseeable future. In our view, the expectation of self-sufficiency for such a program is based on an erroneous financial premise. The program itself is administered quite well and is benefitting many women in one way or the other. The Netherlands Embassy may, therefore, wish to consider continuing its financial relationship with WWF / ICNW beyond 2004 as well.

In such a case, WWF should feel free to look at other sources of grant funds for meeting part of the operating expenses. This would be relatively easy for WWF, considering the depth, management and quality of its credit program. The Netherlands Embassy could also consider facilitating this process of identifying alternate donors.

7. CONCLUSIONS, THREE SCENARIO’S AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 FINDINGS

In order not to repeat the findings that have been already described in the previous only the findings on the credit programme (as formulated by Mrs Kamila) are mentioned here.

1. The Working Women’s Forum has achieved many of its set out objectives namely
   - Organizer women workers on trade lines and create visibility
   - Devise an innovative organizational structure enabling poor women’s participation at all levels.
   - Reach out to large numbers of women workers within a short time span
   - Remain women intensive in nature

2. The credit programme has reached the poorest of the poor women in the informal sector, enabling them to access the Institutional credit at lower interest rates, thus enabling them to come out of heavy indebtedness in many locations and livelihood of the women. Many women have ventured into trade/business/productive activities with the help of credit assistance and there are innumerable number of stories of women to have not decided to commit suicide because of a positive livelihood option in the form of credit support.

3. The women in general were able to make a livelihood option on their own right by taking a kind of self employment which generates an average wage of rupees 20/- (the range from 4 rupees to 30 rupees in most cases and in saree and other hotel industries in thousands of rupees a month). The women refer to the “profit” in most cases, which is just their opportunity labour costs in the particular trades.

4. The increase in assets are ownership of tools for the trade, improvements in the housing conditions, purchase of jewels, and livestock in rural areas, TVs, grinders, and mixers. The important contribution were also relating to educating their girl as well boy children, setting up business for the sons, arranging marriage celebrations for the daughters. There are few reported incidences of changes in the mindset of men towards respecting and recognizing the women’s roles.
5. In most cases, women are the “de facto” women headed households taking the bread winning role, and they express that they no more dependant on the male for any of the family expenses. This has resulted in making some of the men to change their mind set and extend a helping hand to women in terms of contributions. However, in most cases, this approach is more closer to the Efficiency approach to women in development making the women to be more efficient. And in this process, the men become more and more idle.

6. In case of older women, it is obvious that they had spent whole of their life time in earning their living by hard way and bring up children, educate, assist in setting up employment opportunities, and finally end up in the vicious circle of poverty again. This is due to the fact that women are not aware of or educated on “who owns the benefits”.

7. The Life insurance scheme introduced by the WWF has intended to provide social security at the time of death to women. Many of the women have taken life insurance for themselves and their mothers expecting a decent funeral at death. However, the plight of old women are such that the Forum could think of devising suitable schemes to provide them a old age pension, rather than leaving the life insurance to benefit those children who never took any responsibility, to benefit at the time of their death.

8. The access to credit has enabled women to earn their living, enhance their living conditions, and empowered them to exercise full control over the incomes. However, they need to be educated on having some money for themselves without spending the whole for their kith and kin who do not care for them at the old age. The Indian women hood of glorifying women for their sacrifice need to be changed.

9. The need to educate the men also in the development process was felt throughout the mission period while interacting with women. However, the perception of women on this need varies from saying that gender sensitization would lead to more domestic violence among newer groups to requesting for such training /awareness among men by the older groups who are participating in the forum.

10. The domestic violence, abuse, drinking habit of men in families have never reduced which needs some attention. Though women stated that they try to address some of these issues collectively in the groups visiting the member’s households, it still remains to be addressed. Appropriate strategies to be evolved towards addressing these issues such as providing Counseling skills to the Organisers/ Leaders and extending “the addiction” centers to help counter act such problems. The present staff capacities may not be sufficient to address these issues. Therefore, it is advised to have linkages with such organizations who could extend such services and training.

11. The empowerment of women has happened in terms of social, economic arenas but not so much on physical or formal political spheres. In many areas, few women have contested and won in the elections. However, the political perspectives are not seen visibly among all the groups.

12. The role of local Leaders and Organisers are quite crucial in shaping up the credit programme namely,

- Identification of women groups who are in need of the loans
- Assessing the ability to repay, the type of credit assistance required, the type of trade to be taken up by the women
• Introduce the women to the Forum and arrange for further appraisal of the groups by the ICNW staff
• Organize and ensure participation of members in the training programme
• Conduct skill training after the loans have been disbursed to women
• Follow up on repayment and act as a communication channel between the forum and ICNW and women’s groups.
• Counseling on the particular trades and change over when the member incurs losses
• Facilitate collective actions by women’s groups and act as a link between the Union and the women in addressing the common issues such as drinking water, sanitation, electricity, housing rights, transport issues etc.
• The organisers are from among the communities and therefore, the leaders and the organisers help in the horizontal scaling up of the membership in the Forum.

13. The credit programme has been implemented with a set standard of practice of providing loans namely starting with rupees 200 in 1981 and gradually increasing the quantum of loans by additional 200 rupees per annum. The type of trade/occupation/productive activities in which the women are engaged varies from working capital requirement of rupees 150 to 10000 or even 20000 rupees. It appears that there is no flexibility in changing the quantum of loans given for a particular group (exception Kanchipuram). For e.g. the idli sellers require rupees 200 as capital per day (they may stock bit in rice), and the weavers need a capital of 10000/- rupees and the saree business woman may need even 20000 rupees to make a viable propositions. However, when asked the Forum applies certain cautious approach of analyzing the ability repay over several loans such that higher amounts could be given.

14. The difficulties encountered in the implementation of the credit programme are relating to its repayment due the following reasons:

• Seasonal variations in the trade
• Rainy seasons affecting the trade
• Migration of members for casual labour
• Misuse of money by leaders in case of emergency purposes
• Losses in business and so on.

15. The New Economic policies of the Government has affected the hawkers, vendors of agricultural produces. The women state that the procurement costs have doubled and the margins remains the same. The exception are the saree business, the ready made garment producers, tailoring, hotel industry catering to the people on multiple food packages. In fisheries sector, the poor landings caused by mechanization, and prawn fishing has resulted in marginalization of the fishing communities and therefore more number of women have taken up fish marketing as an employment of last resort. This coupled with the credit availability through the forum has enabled women to earn their livelihood and there have been improvements. On the other hand the prawn hatcheries has led to pollution and other hazards in the coast.

16. The Indicators used in problem identification of women are as follows:
• Poverty
• Vulnerability of being exploited by money lenders
• Being engaged in a trade
• Desertion by husbands/ sons
• Planning to be engaged in a trade
• Own house vs. rented premises

In case of Bangalore, Channapatna where there is lot of migrant labour, the question of rented vs. own house been considered as an indicator for selection of women’s groups. In such cases, it is expected that at least the leader should have a own house.

17. In case of impact assessment, a study has been conducted with wide range of indicators. The trainers are assessing the impact at women, household and community levels and monitor the qualitative changes which are taking place. It is suggested that certain important indicators could be derived from the experience such as on decision making, changes in the productive, reproductive and community management roles in relation to the time, labour, physical control over resources, and benefits and cultural changes that has been taking place periodically. The Gender Analysis matrix would help capture the impacts of the project. It would also throw light on the changes in relation to gender equity against the objectives of the project laid out. This had already been discussed with the staff members namely the Coordinators, the trainers and Organisers.

More specifically, the indicators could be on these lines:

- Input Indicators- Relevant to Interventions made by WWF
- Output Indicators- Relevant to target level achievements, which are relating to economic empowerment, and interventions
- Risk or enabling Indicators- Relating to gender equity questions
- Process Indicators- relevant to the type of training provided to the women’s groups.

A workshop for deriving the indicators in a participatory way is suggested.

18. The new economic policies widens the scope of world market and whereas the women’s marketing skills are not enough to reach the local markets directly. In case of production activities such as lace makers, chumki makers, they depend on the middlemen for the supply of raw materials and marketing. The women could come out of the clutches of middlemen through provision of adequate credit facilities, up gradation of designs, and direct marketing skills. In case of weavers, they are dependent on the middlemen for raw material supply as well marketing. They do not have any hopes of coming out of the clutches, due to the reason that WWF has not replaced the existing informal credit facilities which are available to them to meet many of the social needs in time. The process of weaving is done at several stages and it is viable for the middlemen. The history of weaving industry needs to be studied before making any interventions.

19. On the other hand, the WWF in its present context do not have the required expertise to provide support to marketing assistance to women’s groups. It requires conducting market research in the specified area, impart skills on marketing besides enabling them to access particular markets.

The collected data, discussions and analysis as indicated in the previous lead to several scenarios for recommendation in the second half of Phase III and beyond 2004.

**Scenario 1**[^54]: The majority of local branches will be able to achieve financial sustainability by maintaining the 10% in the local office to meet the costs of social mobilisation and training. Consolidation and a 'static' situation of all activities is the assumption on which this sustainability is based.

In this option the mid-term evaluation team strongly recommends the Dutch Government to continue the financial assistance to the credit programme in the second half of Phase III to enable WWF to attain a more solid self-reliant base.

However, this kind of branch sustainability might endanger the pro-poor policy and empowerment effort. Because of lack of funds of the rotating capital no expansion of other credit groups might be able and the danger exists that branches are forced to shift to less pro-poor decisions, as e.g. to give 'heavy' loans to individual women. That might mean less work and more chance for good return rates. Or, they might be compelled to increase the interest rate which will also decrease the reaching out to the poorest women.

Moreover, the previous analysis indicated that it is not 'desirable' to make the branches autonomous in all respects. This will mean a serious loss of the ideological sustainability that has been achieved over the years. So to say, the cut-off of the head office and other branches will wash the cement out of the building and it is questionable if the building will hold on for some time without this crucial ingredient.

**Scenario 2:** Consolidation of activities, as a pre-condition for financial sustainability is unrealistic and against the pro-poor policy of the Forum. The consequences of the above-sketched increasing feminisation of poverty scenario will, no doubt, imply that the demand, and pressure, on the WWF to form more credit groups, to support more individual women in dire need of credit, will only increase. It might also mean that the Forum will be forced to increase the loan amounts for starters and running groups, and that even they might be pressured to decrease the interest rate. It will mean that more group leaders, organisers, area organisers, trainers, bank staff, administrative and support staff has to be appointed for which more finance and training will be required. And, not the least, more partner groups will be interested to be trained in the empowerment methodology, and to get a helping hand in the implementation of the training in their practice. More donor support will be necessary, preferable in grant support.

The WWF is also very well aware that the 'static' sustainability is unrealistic, as it is threatened by increasing poverty, and feminisation of poverty as an effect of various causes (class-, caste-, gender aspects, NEP and globalisation, etc). Social and economic dynamics will urge the WWF to accelerate their expansion of group forming, increase activities and to appointment more (specialised) staff in the future.

[^54]: Scenario 1 is following broadly the assumptions of the Forum regarding their almost sustainability as described in Annex 3.
Therefore scenario 2 starts from the assumption that it will be an absolute necessity that at 'two levels' donor funds have to be acquired in future, namely, at the level of the branches and at the level of the head office in Chennai. Expansion of credit groups, increase in loan amounts, more field staff, more trade union work in the branches can only be met with a 'heavy' financial support from outside funds. The tasks at the head office in particular in delivering expertise on marketing, occupational health, trade union work, advocacy, giving platform training, research and monitoring, etc will require also in the future substantial funds.

In this scenario the mid-term evaluation team also strongly recommends the Dutch Government to continue the financial assistance to the credit programme in the second half of Phase III, to enable WWF to reach out as much as possible to poor women in the informal sector through the credit programme. Moreover, the WWF will be able to follow the recommendations in the following during the second part of Phase III.

Moreover, it is recommended that the Dutch Government supports the Forum (or a linked wing devoted to replication or 'franchising' the empowerment methodology) as a nodal office for net-work funding beyond 2004. As this will require responsibilities of approving and monitoring grants qualified staff and facilities should be required.

It is also suggested that the Dutch Government supports/facilitates the access to other possible donor channels beyond 2004 that can be explored for funding at the two levels mentioned in the above.

The mission strongly recommends to follow the suggestions in scenario 2

Scenario 3
This envisaged scenario is a doom scenario and envisages that in future the poverty might deepen so much that the real poorest women will not at all be able to carry on with their small jobs any more. In this blackest scenario poor women might not be able to make any profit out of the few hundred rupees loan, let alone that they can repay the loan and interest. The fact that overdue is increasing since the past three years, and that utilisation of funds has come down since 1999, might be indications that the economic conditions have hit the poorest in a deadly way. More study is necessary to investigate this assumption as lack of field bank staff might also play a role. This will mean that the recommendations of scenario 2 have to be implemented in a much more intensive and funds requiring way.

Other Recommendations as corrections and adjustments in the second part of Phase III.

Organisational
1. To appoint more organisers, area leaders, trainers and to upgrade their economic and occupational knowledge.
2. To strengthen the branch co-ordinators with professional skills
3. To strengthen the Trade Union wing in all respects at all levels

55 The data are mentioned in chapter 6 in the paragraph 'arrears situation'.
Credit Programme
1. To increase the loans in the credit groups.
2. To pay more attention to the gender issue in terms of responsibilities of men.
3. To pay attention to the access and control of benefits for older women.

Training
The following improvements in training were observed by the mission during the past 5 years:
• more trainers for the training of credit members have been appointed (see above)
• the teaching material/visuals are upgraded and modernised (including the specific occupational/branch gender visuals)
• a nice and clear training manual for trainers has been produced and is used in all the branches by the local trainers.
• for each new loan the women get one day formal training (five years ago only two times). The second training has a focus on occupational health.

Although much have been done, the mission recommends the following types of training to improve the work

- Economic-, Skill- and Occupational training for trainers, organisers, members of credit groups

It was still found that the economic awareness and knowledge on the feasibility and viability of micro entrepreneurial activities of the credit group members and the organisers can be improved. The women are to be trained on cost-benefit of their trades such that they are able to estimate the risks as well the real profits. Although there is counselling on the subject by the bank field officer and in the credit group training, it is felt that the trainers/organisers should be upgraded in their knowledge. We suggest to invite specialist from a training Institute and to organise an extra day training for leaders and members of credit groups.

- Improvement of gender and development and social analysis training, in particular on gender relations, the role of women and the responsibilities of men (alcoholism).

This has been discussed in the previous.

- Continuation of the training in 'alternative livelihood' in Vellore and replication in other branches.

- Study- tours

It is recommended to support study-tours for ICNW and Forum field and office staff to other national and international successful organisations or programmes related to the work of the Forum. The exposure to wider horizons might raise new inspiration and ideas for the diversification of income generating activities, management and financial skills, and other types of trade-union action that might be taken up.

- More training for trade-union staff
In view of the still existing feudal labour relations (pledging, patronage, middle men) and capitalist exploitation found in all the branches, it is strongly recommended to support the trade-union staff with all ways and means. Dutch embassy might send an trade-union expert to investigate the needs of the WWF trade-union staff.

- **Linkages to Government resources**
  It is the opinion of the evaluation team that the WWF should give more effort to link up with Government programmes and resources. In the credit programme there are not many links to the outside world. In order to assist the process of diversification of income generating and to mediate in obtaining resources from Government programmes more linkages with all kinds of Government Departments might be pursued which might also assist in training.

- **Advocacy**
  As we saw even rape and murder cases are not reported at the police and the criminals not punished. To take up a real advocacy role implies that the WWF should have an in-house qualified lawyer, and has access to the judicature. The WWF itself is still thinking of appointing one person in each branch to take on the responsibilities of advocacy, and the strengthening overall external linkages in order to negotiate at their respective district and state levels. These initiatives should be supported as much as possible. Currently, these issues are dealt with by the grassroots women, when their efforts fail the cases are brought to the attention of the head office to lobby with the state government.

**Partnership training and training centre**
The mission want to emphasise the utmost importance of the replication of the 'leading role model' by other NGO's, government institutions and other projects that are related to survival and empowerment strategies of the poor.

Therefore, the functioning of the WWF, as a nodal office for donor support for partnership organisation is wholeheartedly supported by the mission under the condition that a special training department with qualified staff will look after the work.

A new training centre will be necessary in this pursuit. Land and (old) building, adjacent to the head office has been acquired for that purpose. More funds will be necessary to renovate/reconstruct the purchased training centre. The 'renovated' centre can also reduce the lack of space of the regular credit group training and numerous other meetings.

As, in future, an expansion and intensification of regular training is foreseen, a new, or expansion of a, training centre will be an absolute necessity. Preparation of training materials, organising material development workshops will be a priority of the training exercises. Therefore, there is a need for additional building space in a training centre, dormitory and training equipment.

**Studies**
The research and monitoring cell in WWF can be strengthened by a guest participatory course in social science (in particular qualitative, PRA) methodology. The ‘teacher’ should be a senior with long experience in practical gender studies. It should be a ‘learning-by-doing’ exercise with a few days classroom training.
The course can use one of the following subjects for which studies are suggested:

- ‘the situation of debt-bondage among the Women Silk Weavers of Kanchipuram town in Tamil Nadu State of India’. An excellent research proposal has been drawn up by Sri Vydhia Rajagopal, co-ordinator at the head office in Chennai.

- The impact of alcoholism on the living conditions of women in rural and urban areas,

- The male dominance in loan supported productive activities in rural areas.


**Network-funding.**

Funding a network through WWF would mean that WWF would have to take on responsibilities of approving and monitoring grants. This requires substantial effort if it is to be executed properly. The profile of staff required for this role is also different from that of the present WWF team.

It is our suggestion, therefore, that if the Netherlands Embassy and WWF wish to explore this avenue, then they may wish to consider setting up a wing organisation linked to WWF, and devoted to expanding / ‘franchising’ the credit program.

**Recommendation beyond 2004 of the financial expert.**

As indicated earlier, a credit program such as this cannot become self-sufficient in the foreseeable future. In ‘our’ view, the expectation of self-sufficiency for such a program is based on an erroneous financial premise. The program itself is administered quite well and is benefiting many women in one way or the other. The Netherlands Embassy may,
therefore, wish to consider continuing its financial relationship with WWF / ICNW beyond 2004 as well.

In such a case, WWF should feel free to look at other sources of grant funds for meeting part of the operating expenses. This would be relatively easy for WWF, considering the depth, management and quality of its credit program. The Netherlands Embassy could also consider facilitating this process of identifying alternate donors.

**Concluding remark team leader.**
The above recommendation beyond 2001 is endorsed by the team leader. The Netherlands Embassy might reconsider her decision *not* to continue its financial relationship with the WWF beyond 2004. Main reason for the reconsideration is, that evaluations and studies show that the funding of the WWF guarantees that the poorest women (households) in India are reached, which should have the highest priority in the light of the 'new' world wide awareness (after 11 September 2001) that all ways and means have to be used, to reduce the increasing polarisation between the rich and the poor.

Photo 7. Silk weaver in Kanchipuram
1. Introduction and rationale

The Working Women's Forum (WWF) seeks to empower poor working class women through mobilisation of women into neighbourhood credit groups, which take short-term loans from a revolving credit society established by WWF. Begun in Madras city in 1978, with an initial membership of 800 women, the Forum now (up to Dec'2000) works in three states and has a membership of over 96,00,000 women.

The main aim of the Netherlands supported programme to WWF is credit assistance and employment of women in order to improve their living and working conditions, thus strengthening their bargaining power and power to press for their rights and privileges.

The project is implemented in Andhra Pradesh (West Godavari, East Godavari, Bhimavaram), Karnataka (Bangalore, Bidar) and Tamil Nadu (Madras, Adiramapattinam, Dindigul, Vellore).


An Indo-Dutch Joint evaluation of the second phase took place in July 1996 to review and evaluate the activities of WWF. The findings of the evaluation were positive and the mission recommended continuing the credit programme support in the third phase to enable WWF to expand and increase loans. However, the mission also recommended that the Netherlands assistance should be limited to the third and final phase for a period of 5 years which will be a period of transition and transformation.

Following this the third and final phase was initiated in January 1998 for a duration of 6 and a 1/2 years up to June 2004 with a contribution up to a maximum of Nlg. 2.830.823/- . It was also agreed upon that a mid-term review would take place in the year 2001 in collaboration with Rabobank Foundation in order to recommend, if necessary, mid-course corrections, budget adjustments and a long term business plan leading towards self-sufficiency and independence of WWF.

Therefore, the major objective of this review mission is to primarily review the developments and achievements of Working Women's Forum since the initiation of the third phase, nevertheless, using the experiences of the earlier phases as an analytical frame work.

II. Objectives of the evaluation

The progress and activities of Working Women's Forum Phase III will be reviewed to assess how successful its immediate objectives are being achieved, and to identify flourishing and restraining
factors which impact upon the capacity of the Forum in realising the empowerment of poor urban and rural women.

The mission should pay particular attention: to the appropriateness and productivity of the credit provided, competence and strength of the staff to manage the Credit Programme and also look into the process of strengthening of women's control over their own livelihood.

Findings and recommendations should be presented to support possible improvements for the remaining period of Phase III, specifically, financial viability of the credit programme leading towards self-sufficiency.

III. Contents of the Review
The contents of the review to be addressed can be divided into four distinctive areas: Organisational analysis, analysis of the credit programme, financial viability of the programme in terms of leading to self-sufficiency and the extent of achievement of WWF as training ground for women and women's organisations leading to setting up of a full fledged training centre.

A. Organisational analysis

The central question within this analysis is whether the organisational structure of the Forum is optimal and compatible in view of the commitment, objectives and strategies of WWF?

The specific issues to be addressed are:

a) Policy and decision-making, planning and accountability at various levels including the members.
b) Division of tasks, internal communication, systems of checks and balances, leadership within WWF and local leadership.
c) Staff capacity regarding planning and programme implementation and staff development.
d) Gender relations within the organisation

e) Is organisational structure adequate to lead to the process of sustainability and self-sufficiency

B. Credit Programme analyses

The various issues within this section include:

a) The role of consumptive/productive small credit in survival strategies and empowerment of poor women also achievements in improvement of income plus employment, increases in assets, improvement of housing-conditions, schooling of children, changes in employment of males, increase in self-esteem, more decision making/ power in the household, and others.
b) The extent to which the Credit Programme has contributed to the successful achievements of WWF’s objectives?
c) The role of local leaders and credit organisers of local branches in shaping the Credit programme. How do the local leaders perceive themselves in shaping the credit programme?
d) To what extent has the credit programme been adjusted to the socio-economic and financial context in which it is operating?
e) The constraints encountered in implementation of the Credit programme and measures taken to overcome these (attitude of men, husbands, patriarchy);
f) The indicators used in problem identification and impact measurement (certain type of activities may become not profitable anymore; is any market research been undertaken and consequently are members advised to change to other types of activities.

C. Training
In the area of training following issues needs to be include:

a) To what extend the linkages and co-operation have been developed with other organisations, NGO networks, formal institutions, government, etc in the field of training
b) The present status of the training centre, achievements and bottlenecks
D. Internal review & Financial Viability

a) Credit Performance in terms of repayment rate, arrears situation revolving fund and present operating expenses. Further in consultation with WWF develop a format for reporting to the Embassy for the revolving fund provided for in this project.
b) Examine the feasibility and financial viability of the credit programme to be self-sufficient beyond 2004.
c) Mechanisms of internal monitoring and evaluation
d) Extent and kind of tie up and network with financial institutions within and outside the country.
e) Review on test basis one of the six-monthly financial claim submitted by WWF to the Embassy for reimbursement covering the period 1/7/2000 to 30/6/2001.

Conclusions and recommendations

Finally the mid-term review is expected to come up with:
- Findings, recommendations and conclusions of review (based on the analyses under A, B, C and D) along the lines of the objectives of the review (III).

Summary of findings and recommendations of the review (based on the analysis under A, B, C and D) along the lines of the objectives of the review (III).

IV. Methodology

The review process

The review is preceded by an agreement between RNE and WWF on the content of these terms of reference. The review is supposed to take place in full consultation between the reviewers and WWF. During the process the following steps are important:
* Study of documents produced by WWF
* An introductory meeting with management, staff and leaders of WWF, with an aim to agree upon the content and the main principles of the arrangements necessary for the review.
* Discussion meetings and interviews with the staff and members,
* Field visits to income generating activities;
* Interviews with selected key-persons outside the organisation.

presentation and discussion of the preliminary findings of the review with the leadership and staff and if possible selected members. The main results of the discussion, which can be considered as a feedback process, shall be included in the final mid-term review report.

Methods And Techniques

The methodology applied will be collection of primary data both qualitative and quantitative from the field. Secondary sources of information also constitute the basis for semi-structured/partly open-ended interviews and discussion meetings with leadership, staff, members and other key persons.

V. Composition, Timetable and Itinerary and Conduct of the Evaluation Mission

- Small credit and micro enterprise expert
- Gender and organisational expert
- Financial expert

Time and duration
26 November to 19 December 2001 with additional 5 days for the team leader to complete the report.

Reporting
Before departure the mission will arrange a wrap up meeting with the Forum's leadership, staff and selected members, and present a preliminary summary of its findings.

The leader of the mission is also responsible for reflecting any corrections of fact and significant comments on the draft report in the final version and for seeing that a sufficient number of copies are made available to the Netherlands Government and WWF for formal distribution.

The leader of the mission is responsible for ensuring that the draft report in English is completed within six weeks of the end of the field work.
Annex 2. Itineraries

**Itinerary Sanjay Agarwal**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dates</th>
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<td>26-Nov-01 to 29-Nov-01</td>
<td>Chennai</td>
<td>Briefing, field visits, WWF review</td>
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<td>30-Nov-01 to 1-Dec-01</td>
<td>Dindigul, TN</td>
<td>Field visit, branch review</td>
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<td>2-Dec-01 to 4-Dec-01</td>
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<td>5-Dec-01 to 16-Dec-01</td>
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<td>Embassy meeting, data analysis, report drafting</td>
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<td>Meeting at Embassy</td>
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**Summary of time spent:**

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**Persons met**

- Dr. Jaya Arunachalam, President, WWF / ICNW
- Ms. Vasuki, Loan Officer, WWF / ICNW
- Ms. Rajeswari, Particulars officer, WWF / ICNW
- Ms. Egammai, Secretary, ICNW
- Ms. Srividya Rajgopalan, Training Officer, WWF / ICNW
- Ms. Vasantha, Monitoring Cell, WWF / ICNW
- Ms. Priya, WWF
- Ms. Padmavathi, WWF
- Shri S. Manisekaran, Partner of M/s Venkat and Rangaa, Chartered Accountants, (ICNW auditors)
- Branch staff at WWF, Dindigul
- Women’s group members at Chennai and Dindigul
- Netherlands Embassy officers
- Mission members

Prepared by: S. Agarwal, mission member. Delhi. 16-Jan-02

Mrs Kamila visited the following branches of the WWF

- Chenna (several branches)
- Dindigul (Tholayarppuram, Kamatchipuram, K, Dharumathupatti, Anumantha Nagar)
- Adhiramapathinam (Keelathottam, Peikrikadu)
- Bangalore (Amali Thoddi, Onganur, Halla urda Halli)
- Hyderabad
- Narsapuram (Sarveswars, Garu Thottam)
- Malkipuram (Anthervedi)
- Palakol (Bhimavaram)

New Delhi debriefing at Netherlands Embassy 19th December 2001.
ITINERARY  Loes Schenk-Sandbergen
Sunday 25 Nov  2001: Travel Pondicherry-Chennai
Monday 26 Nov: Start of the mission. Meeting with counterpart members of the mission.
Introduction of staff of WWF. Briefing/Debriefing of gender specialist Mrs Joke van Muijlwijk.
Tuesday 27 Nov: Visit to the head office of the Indian Cooperative Network for Women (ICNW),
Chennai Visit to North Chennai to a first year credit group
Wednesday 28 Nov: Revisit to Mylapore slum, Natesan Road Krishnampettai; Revisit to Pallavan Salai slum
Thursday 29 Nov: Discussion mission members; Discussion head office Chennai
Friday 30 Nov: report writing
Saturday 1 December: Interviews with heavy borrowers; Interviews with trainers
Sunday 2 Dec: Discussion mission members
Monday 3 Dec: Leave for Kanchipuram. Review at Kanchipuram (Silk weavers). Drive to Vellore and stay
Tuesday 4 Dec: Review at Vellore (beedi workers and alternative livelihood options).
Wednesday 5 Dec: Review at Vellore (beedi workers and alternative livelihood options). Leave for Bangalore by train
Thursday 6 Dec: Bangalore, ill
Friday 7 Dec: Bangalore, visit branch office, visit credit group
Saturday 8 Dec: Bangalore-Chennai
Sunday 9 Dec: Chennai-Delhi
Monday 10 Dec: Delhi-London-Amsterdam
Annex 3. Note of the WWF on financial sustainability.

At the moment all the assets are put in the name of the Working Women’s Forum (India) as the laws pertaining to the Co-operatives in India are very unsteady, and as result victims of government’s dissolution, as and when a new government takes over due to political interference. The WWF being in its consolidation phase has invested in getting ownership of office buildings to save the heavy rent expenditures which eat away the profits. This ownership of the building is almost uniform everywhere excepting in four of the branches, which eventually will follow. WWF has also build up an endowment fund to make sure see that the interest accrued in the long run will sustain the salaries of its employees, staff and other costs.

Concerning the sustainability of the ICNW the mission wants to remark the following. An endowment fund has been built up in the ICNW for three reasons.

- One reason is that it will be a source fund, if, and when, the ICNW wants to borrow from the national Banking Sources. In the prevalent Indian borrowing situation ICNW can borrow at least 5 to 10 times the guarantee fund.
- Secondly, while the endowment stands guarantee for the strong base for ICNW’s continuity and sustainability, the interest accrued will be used as rotating capital fund for the branches in need, if necessary.
- Thirdly, each branch has been made already self-reliant by using the fund earmarked for them for rotating capital requirements. If by any chance some of the branches are transacting lesser business that the funds earmarked, the remaining amount is tied up in the name of the same branch as a fixed deposit. The interest accrued from this amount will meet the expenditure of the branch in terms of payment of staff salaries, stationery and other overhead costs.

The main thrust of the recommended funding for the second half of Phase III is to make all the branches financial sustainable. In view of the present financial capacity of the branches, which varies per branch (old and new ones) the accumulation process is in progress. Rotating capital for the credit programme is at this moment partly accrued out of the grant of the Dutch government, the interest rate of 18% and the deposited shares (Rs 20/- 10% of the credit). At the moment the credit programme covers the direct operational costs, in which the inflation costs are included, out of 8% of the interest. 10% goes to the Women’s Forum to finance new branches and overall training costs and to accumulate a small endowment fund. At the moment the branches have an allotment of their finances as agreed upon at the annual meetings in December to cover costs for personnel, buildings, maintenance, travel, training etc. It is estimated that these costs can be met in the near future out of the proceeds of the total interest rate of 18%. In future the remaining interest of 10% will remain in the branches, and the ICNW will take responsibility of salaries of the credit organisers.
Annex 4 Details of Membership as on Sept. 2001

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<td>70438</td>
<td>703683</td>
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</table>
Annex 5 New references, and bibliography external publications on the WWF.

New references

Breman, Jan (2001)

Krishnaraj, Maithreyi (1999)
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1994, Hosmer, Margaret & Mitter Swasti, Women in Trade Unions, Organizing the Unorganized, published by ILO, Geneva,


2000, Pied, Ilse du, Swimming against the tide, The Working Women’s Forum’s (WWF) role to facilitate the empowerment process of poor fisherwomen in Adirampaatanam (India), M.A. thesis, University of Amsterdam, Cultural Anthropology & Non-Western Sociology.

Photo 8 Trainees of tailoring class in Vellore