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**Food, Better Programming and Gender: An integration of frameworks in an
analysis of Navdanya community initiatives in India**

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Introduction

As a part of my practicum at Navdanya, a grassroots organization led by women and committed to the preservation of biological and cultural diversity, I have prepared a report that investigates the most applicable social and ‘development’ frameworks that are considered within the realm of current international best practice. It is my hope that this information will provide Navdanya with a more thorough background on relevant frameworks, as well as provide them with opportunities for strengthening their current programming initiatives.

Within my primary analysis I will investigate the Food Security Conceptual Framework offered by Food and Nutrition Technical Assistance (FANTA) and the Better Programming Initiative (BPI), a framework developed and used by the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. To highlight the importance of integrating gender into a thorough assessment, I will also include Oxfam’s Women’s Empowerment Framework (WEF) analysis. Each of these frameworks highlight the strengths and challenges of the Navdanya program, offering potential sites for transformation that allow for further growth and social change within the communities that the organization operates. Additionally, each of the frameworks address limitations of the other, providing a more thorough examination of the organization as a whole.

Organizational Background: Women for Diversity (Navdanya)

Reclaiming our right to community control of food systems is perhaps one of the most effective tools in the fight for community and planetary health. Under trade liberalization groups such as the World Trade Organization and the North American Free Trade Association the basic human right to food and clean water are questioned in the

name of corporate profit. Over the last thirty years, the globalization of agricultural systems into huge agribusiness corporations has placed control over food systems into the hands of multinational corporations based largely in the Global North (McKibben, 2007). A multiplicity of resistance has sprung up against this domination, led in part by the renowned ecofeminist, activist and scholar Dr. Vandana Shiva. In her book Earth Democracy: Justice, Sustainability and Peace (2005), Shiva refers to 'the earth family' (p.1) or the community of all beings supported by the earth. Earth democracy is a call to remind the citizens of the earth of the connection to the earth and between all living beings as well as the responsibilities that flow from these relationships. Shiva states that corporate globalization is based on the principle of 'enclosure' based on violence or ownership of the rich "based on the dispossession of the poor" (p. 2).

As a part of her work, Shiva advocates on behalf of global farmers, whose right to livelihood is being stripped by corporations such as Monsanto who are at the forefront of Genetically Modified Foods (GMF), 'foods' which are genetically altered by human intervention. Over time, GMF's strip the soils of the nutrients required for growth, resulting in mass desertification and infertility of traditional agricultural lands (Navdanya, 2007). Moreover, GMF's may require specific fertilizers, which farmers must purchase at exorbitant costs from large agribusiness corporations. GMF's may also be packaged in what has come to be known as 'terminator seeds'; seeds which cannot be saved for a following season's planting after a harvest. These 'terminator seeds' require chemicals which must be purchased for seed germination, thus eliminating traditional farming techniques, alienating farmers from seed production, harvest and storage, removing women from their traditional roles as seed keepers and inhibiting the ability of

rural communities to meet their basic survival needs (Navdanya, 2007; Shiva & Crompton, 1998; Shiva, Emani & Jafri, 1999)

In response to the mass suicides of Indian farmers who are no longer able to carve lives for themselves and their families on land that has supported them for generations (Shiva, 2009; Navdanya, 2007), Shiva created Navdanya; a woman-centred teaching institute and seed bank which educates communities on the principles of organic farming, sustainable living, heritage seed storage and women's empowerment (Navdanya, 2007). Shiva states that women are the primary producers within a sustenance economy. Within this system they are core providers of food, water, health and social security. As food is taken away from public control, nutrition is moved into the patriarchal sphere, owned, distributed and sold for the profit and benefit of the men who are at the helms of multi-national corporations including Dow, Monsanto, Pepsi and others (Navdanya, 2007; Shiva, 2005). Defining 'food sovereignty' as "the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agricultural systems" (Global Exchange, 2007), Navdanya asserts community control of resources and our basic right to sustainable, healthy food that has been produced in a nonviolent manner (Navdanya, 2007).

Food and Nutrition Technical Assistance (FANTA) Food Security Framework and Navdanya

FANTA's Food Security Framework was developed in 1999 to address communities that are experiencing food insecurity. Defining food security as the ability of "all people at all times have both physical and economic access to sufficient food to

meet their dietary needs for a productive and healthy life” (Riely et al, 1999, p. 2), the model allows practitioners to understand the multiplicity of systems that operate in times of food crisis. Beginning at the broad level of social, policy and natural environmental contexts, the framework then shifts focuses toward the inputs that community, natural, capital and human resources have on food utilization, access and availability. All of these factors contribute to food utilization, which is influenced heavily by quality of care, dietary intake and health status.

The case of Navdanya can be clearly applied to FANTA’s model. Through analysis it becomes clear that the globalization of agribusiness has influenced the local communities ability to achieve food security. The production of GMF’s and the increased use of pesticides and fertilizers that strip the soils and contribute to farmer poverty have influenced the quality of care with which food is produced. The market purchase level of the framework that directly relates to food access has been affected by the marketing of GMF seeds and seed patents. At the macro level, the FANTA model highlights how social and policy directives (both within the National and International spheres) have influenced community members right to self-determination through food sovereignty. This model also illustrates how social and policy decisions have impacted the ability of the natural environment to regenerate and continue to provide food.

The FANTA model poses some useful questions in the analysis of food utilization: where do households get their food? What are the factors that limit the ability of households to obtain food from each of these sources? Which marginalized groups have the least food security? Who makes decisions about how food is distributed? (Riely et al, 1999, p. 15 - 17).

Perhaps one of the greatest limitations of the FANTA model is its inability to capture the importance of the 'quality' and 'integrity' of food systems. Limited by its definition of 'food security' (implying calories and quantity of food) rather than a broad definition of 'food sovereignty' (encompassing a wide range of concerns from traditional use of land to the ability to save seed), the FANTA model does not overtly include for the factors that indicate respectful human relationship to the earth. FANTA is unable to adequately capture the community connections and strengths that provide valuable sites for resistance to the global agribusiness model including: a focus on sustainability and the use of traditional agricultural techniques (which do not strip soil productivity over time).

While the global trend has been toward agricultural conglomeration in name of mass production, smaller farms actually produce more food per acre (in calories and in dollars), employ four times as many people and produce two thirds less waste per acre (McKibben, 2007). They do not rely on pesticides to the same level as large-scale industries, and farmers are able to manage their land in a way that leads to sustainable long-term land use. Even in the consumer stage, small-scale farming is beneficial. In smaller-scale industries food sovereignty is ensured and sustainable practices can be promoted (Shiva, 2005). It is essential that new frameworks are developed that have the capability to record and recognize the importance of these essential qualities. Navdanya can play a vital role in the creation of new global strategies to meet food needs, as it situates itself as a leader in issues of food sovereignty and community connectivity.

Another limitation of the FANTA model within the International context is FANTA's specific objective to utilize American based food aid and food security definitions. This biased premise of delivery can undermine the local ability for

sustainability and destroy local markets by flooding markets with American product (Ching, 2008). In his article, “Africa, the Food Crisis and Food Aid”, Ching argues that some view the current food crisis in the Global South as a veiled opportunity to pump genetically modified crops into the market and environment of Southern countries. Ching argues that when people are shocked by calamitous events such as war, environmental or economic disaster, they are less able to defend themselves and are more susceptible to exploitative policies that are placed on them by more powerful nations (Ching, 2008).

While the FANTA model provides important insights into the case of food sovereignty in India and to the work of Navdanya as a whole, FANTA’s model also contains numerous gaps and limitations that need to be met by other frameworks and perspectives. The Better Programming Initiative (BPI) and the Women’s Empowerment Framework (WEF) offer two complimentary perspectives that contribute to a holistic analysis.

The Better Programming Initiative (BPI) and Navdanya

Established in post-conflict realities, the BPI centralizes its focus on an analysis within a broad context of factors that both challenge (divide) and strengthen (connect) communities. This awareness of connectors and dividers can intimately define the success or failure of a program. In the communities within which Navdanya is working there are a variety of dividers and connectors. Some community members struggle to meet basic needs at a daily level, while others have benefited from the poverty of the majority through acting as brokers for global agribusiness. As a whole, the community is separated from traditional ways of being an understanding, as breaks in transmission of

traditional knowledge has been impacted by globalization and the removal of women from the production process (Navdanya, 2007; Shiva, 2005). Additionally, India finds itself at a globalized crossroads, influenced by the policy implications and financial decisions of the Global North (Shiva, 1999). Conversely, the community is choosing to reclaim traditional agricultural models and has come together around social justice issues (Navdanya, 2007). This is indicative of strong community relationships, good communication, resiliency and an ability to work well together as a region.

Through offering a framework which takes into account the past, present and future context of a situation, the BPI allows for a fairly timeless analysis that is flexible enough to adjust or shift according to need or new learning's. Additionally, the BPI includes in its model a final stage of "repeat analysis" which encourages practitioners to continue to engage with the action and reflection cycle on an ongoing basis. This discourages stagnation within the model, and allows it to shift and adjust based on where and what the 'true needs' are rather than what they may have been in the past. In the case of Navdanya's evolving work, the BPI model offers a process through which programs can be analyzed, shifted and re-implemented to ensure program success. Navdanya has been able to utilize this function of the model with success, by asking community members to continually evaluate program initiatives and suggest changes to the program headquarters in New Delhi (Navdanya, 2007).

The BPI offers to the initial FANTA analysis a focus on project sustainability, questioning how Navdanya's programming will impact the community relationships both during and post contact. The BPI investigates how connectors may be strengthened, while not diminishing the impact of dividers. The BPI also focuses on the long-term well being

of the organization and community that is making use of the model, through asking the planners to look closely at where their programming initiatives lie. It highlights concerns such as: which communities/individuals are being served through this initiative? Which communities/individuals are not? How will this alignment influence the long-term health and well being of the community and of the involved organization? What are the political and social implications of being involved within this location of the context? This focus on the social context of a situation allows for a thorough analysis of the power relationships that occur in development work, and offers a ‘social’ focus to food programs and frameworks such as FANTA’s. In the case of Navdanya, all programming initiatives are locally initiated, implemented and evaluated. ‘External’ experts may be brought in to strengthen aspects of the initiative, however the program itself is completely self-sustaining.

By making community resources and connectors explicit, the BPI provides a strength-based and capacity-building approach to working with communities and systems. These strengths are not based on external resources, but instead emerge through the process of participation and community collaboration. As Bandura articulates in his seminal article on community efficacy, “a strong sense of efficacy enhances human accomplishment and personal well – being in many ways” (Bandura, 1994, p. 1). By recognizing and celebrating community strengths, efficacy is increased, and community capacity is enhanced.

While the BPI strengthens the program level implementation of Navdanya’s work as it offers a strength-based and user-friendly analysis of local contexts, the BPI lacks the ability to focus in on specific groups within a community who are experiencing

vulnerability. Specifically, women have been particularly negatively influenced by the global policies that have influenced decreased food production, harmed the community's relationship to the land and cut off families' ability to provide food for themselves. This analysis can be further strengthened through the addition of a gender framework such as the WEF.

Women's Empowerment Framework (WEF) and Navdanya

Given the required scope of this analysis, it is impossible to elaborate on the WEF in full detail. However, an analysis of Navdanya's work would not be fully possible without accounting for the important role of gender. The WEF offers a context within which to analyse the shifting gender dynamics of the communities in which Navdanya works. Utilizing the core themes of welfare, access, conscientization, participation and control as primary indicators, the WEF highlights areas that can impact women's empowerment and livelihoods. The goal of the WEF is to overcome gender inequality, an important objective in any development context.

Mirroring the BPI's simplicity, the WEF can be applied in a complex situation, for a quick 'snapshot' analysis. Through offering a gender perspective, the project can be re-evaluated or reframed to strengthen the goals and approach and to ensure that the communities who are most vulnerable are served through the initiative. Through a WEF analysis women's role in the transferring of traditional knowledge, managing of the food bank, sharing of seed storage techniques and acting globally to unite women are highlighted. WEF also supports Navdanya's assertion that women need to be in equal positions with men in areas of participation, policy-making and administration (March et

al, 1999). By focusing on the most marginalized community members (low income women) Navdanya offers a bottom-up development approach that impacts the whole community.

When implemented correctly, the WEF is not used to the exclusion of men. Instead, women are supported in achieving their own ambitions, and have more choice in the roles that they fill. Women's successes are celebrated, and traditional knowledge that has been passed through generations of women can be acknowledged, recorded and transferred in a manner that benefits all community members equally (Navdanya, 2007).

Shortcomings of the WEF including a lacking ability to analyse the long-term relationships between community members can be noted through including for the BPI analysis, which offers a viewpoint of community relationships through highlighting community strengths. Meanwhile, the FANTA framework offers the WEF a macro scope, bringing practitioner awareness to natural, social and political levels of influence.

Conclusion

It is essential to utilize a multiplicity of analyses when working within a complex and interwoven global context. Each framework provides a series of unique strengths as well as challenges, and each offer a slightly different perspective to community concerns and potential solutions. When seeking the most appropriate frameworks within which to position an organization, it is essential to gather as much information as possible to utilize community strengths and to work from a grassroots and anti-oppressive standpoint.

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