WOMEN CHANGE DECISIONS

Final report of the research project entitled

Women, decision making and local strategies : some comparisons between Italy and the UK

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This document has been prepared for use within the Commission. It does not necessarily represent the Commission's official position.

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foreword

FOREWORD

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

I.   Women have their own distinct definition of politics, and their own approach to decision making. They have sought to introduce their own agendas within local and national politics, and to increase their access to decision making within public sector institutions and political parties.

II. Women have invested considerable energy at high personal cost into changing political institutions which are now in crisis. The public sector is being reconstructed on the basis of a new, market based set of values. Women have developed their own approach to wielding power in organisations, and this and other research suggests that their approach to decision making presents itself as an alternative to the old dysfunctional of working.

III. We identify a long and a short agenda for change: access to decision making positions (the short agenda) as an aim in itself, and transformation of organisations, by introducing new models of decision making, in order to open up organisations for women in their different roles as decision makers and as citizens.

IV. We interview women in three contrasting contexts in Italy and the UK, in order to find out how if at all they have been able to gain access to decision making within political and administrative structures. These are: women working on race equalities issues in a Health Authority and a Local Authority in the UK, and women working on the campaign Women Change Time at national and local level in Italy.

V.   We investigate the role of alliances between women inside and outside organisations in bringing about organisational change to increase women's access to decision making, and how and whether women are able to build these alliances in the context of the 1990's.

VI. Alliances between women inside and outside organisations, and between women in different roles, were necessary in order to challenge the predominant culture within organisations and to effect

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change. Yet these were often fragile and difficult to sustain.

VII. We found that women often confused alliance building and networking. Their support needs sometimes blocked the process of defining clear objectives for working together and of negotiation of differences between women.

VIII. A different model of power emerges from the experience of women in all three case studies. This model represents an ideal which women share, and operates as a powerful force for change.

IX. Related to this model of power a common approach to decision making emerges, based on commitment to using decision making power to open up decision making structures.

X. We identify internal and external barriers to women within decision making. Both men and women have powerful internal resistances to believing n women's ability to occupy decision making positions in organisations. These relate to an internalised set of expectations about what it is to wield power.

XI. Many women decision makers have adopted ways of wielding power which they felt were necessary in order to get things done, and have dissociated themselves from initiatives to address gender within their organisations.

XII. We found women decision makers often could not identify with male norms of behaviour, and this made it difficult for them to hold on to a sense of how much power they actually had in their role within their organisation.

XIII. The position of black women in the UK and Italy contrasts starkly. In the UK black women are present in public sector and political organisations, and have succeeded in gaining some access to decision making. In Italy where there is no tradition of black citizenship black women with rare exceptions are absent from public sector and political organisations.

XIV. Women within local communities are often the initiators of change within institutions, and are essential allies for women inside

organisations. Yet they are excluded by decision making processes and structures which undermine their participation.

XV. Women refugees were interviewed in the UK local authority case study. We found that women community activists are often isolated within their own communities as well as from political and public sector organisations. Women in organisations who have tried to reach out to them are often in conflict with their national government whose policy is to reduce access to decision making and to services for refugees.

XVI. All the women we interviewed found the personal cost of carrying out their work as decision makers within organisations was high. They rarely found validation for their work within organisations, and relied upon eternal sources and their own belief systems to sustain a sense of self worth.

XVII. Despite all these difficulties their achievements were impressive: inventing new mechanisms to change the culture and structures of organisations to make them more accessible to women and compatible with their preferred way of working.

XVIII. Women are now at a crossroads: will their achievements be recognised and women encouraged to continue their work, of opening up decision making, to create new, more responsive organisations appropriate to the 1990's?

INTRODUCTION

This research sets out to explore how women are working together, towards women's equality. In particular we were interested in how women work together across organisational boundaries and roles.

Our approach is premised on a model of change which makes the following assumptions concerning efffective strategies for women to gain access to decision making:

* access to decision making and to its underlying processes cannot made to stick by simple reliance on policy change. The nature of the changes required bring a complex set of resistances into play which include subjective as well as objective factors .

* In order to successfully overcome these resistances women need to build alliances based on a common agenda, and to draw up common objectives. This process must include recognition of the different roles and priorities of the parties involved, and negotiation of an agreed programme of action.

* significant progress towards women's equality within organisations is facilitated by an alliance of women inside and women outside the organisation, and between women at all levels within the organisation .

We drew this model from our own experience of working in organisations towards women's equality in the '80's. The model predates the current slogan: 'equal opportunities makes business sense' which is being championed within the private sector, and promoted by the government supported Equal Opportunities 2000 campaign in England.

We designed our research to investigate how women decision makers in the '90's are working, and what models of change are implied within their work. We asked them:
* what goals they had relating to access to decision making for women
* what strategies they adopted
* what alliances they made with women in different roles
* what barriers they encountered in gaining access to decision making themselves
* how they negotiatied these barriers

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The material we uncovered relates to two major themes:
*   access to decision making for the individual women we interview
*   the position these women take up in relation to a wider agenda for change.

This wider agenda aims to open up decision making to women as a group, including women located at different levels within the organisation and outside it. We might term these two themes the long and the short agenda for change, in relation to women and decision making.

Inevitably these two themes intersect, and cross over within the discussions with interviewees. Women identified with the longer agenda need to have secured access to decision making themselves in order to be effective. Women working to the shorter agenda all professed commitment to the longer one. However while we found a common value base between women who identify with the longer agenda, this linking of the two agendas was implied rather than explicit.

The mechanisms for moving from one agenda to the other were unstated, and as a result there was often no clear basis for alliances to be built between women in different positions. Relationships were confused between women who were located at different levels within the public sector organisations and who were in different positions in relation to the decision making processes. These relationships were characterised by feelings of negativity which indicated more than 'communication problems'. We felt that they signalled deeply rooted hopes, desires that their needs will be met which women hold towards each other in organisations.

In the case studies we explore the subjective and objective factors which characterise these relationships and their effect on the potential for women to work together across organisational boundaries to open up access to decision making processes.

RESEARCH FINDINGS IN RELATION TO RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The research has documented new material on the experience of women participating in decision making processes in public sector institutions in England and Italy. This is recorded in the case studies.

Two of the case studies present the experience of women in two different public sector organisations in England, and illustrate some of the effects on women decision makers of reorganisation of public sector institutions. These case studies contrast with the experience of Italian women, working at national and local level to increase political representation of women and to change political processes in local authorities. The Italian case study focuses on 'Women Change Time', a national campaign, and on how it has been taken up by women within local authorities under the campaign slogan 'Time in the City'.

The case studies do not attempt to evaluate women's interactions within the organisations specified or the effectiveness of their equal opportunities strategies. They do investigate how the women interviewed view the interactions under investigation. Women in different sections of the organisations concerned felt they were affected differently by organisational change and that they would inevitably have different perceptions of events.

We identify the specific experience of black and ethnic minority women in public sector decision making, by selecting organisations for the UK case studies where they are represented in each of the three subject categories on which the research focuses. This proved impossible in Italy because of a total absence of black or minority ethnic women in public sector decision making positions. Reasons for this are outlined in the Italian case study.

We have analyzed the strategies adopted by women to gain access to decision making in Italy and England. We explore these through the theme of networking and alliances between women, as a strategy for effective working.

We have identified measures which increase effective participation in decision making processes within public sector institutions by women elected or appointed through political processes, paid employees and members of independent organisations in Italy and England. These measures emerge from discussion of what sustained or undermined alliances which women made with each other in their roles as public sector employees, elected members, and members of independent community groups.

We have established an ongoing exchange of practical ideas and experience between England and Italy. The ELISSA co-worker has visited London twice for Research Project meetings, and on these occasions has met with the research advisors, has taken part in interviews, and co- facilitated a workshop based on the research material.[1] The research director has visited Italy twice, conducted interviews and discussed the research project with elected members and employees working on women's equality and Time and Hours of the City in Milan, Perugia and Modena. The research has been well publicised in Italy and the UK, through broadsheets, conferences and networking events. The project director has made presentations on the research themes at international events such as the EC sponsored conference in Aarhus, 'Women in Public Jobs', May 1992. The director participated in the EC Athens conference 'Women in Power', and with her co-worker is seeking opportunities to develop their work in collaboration with the EC Women and Decision Making expert network. A seminar to begin this process will be held in Milan in May 1993.

During the research we have identified with research participants areas of interest for ongoing exchange and networking. These include proposals for training events, and are detailed in the section 8, recommendations for action.

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[1]The workshop, *Models of Success for women within the Public Sector*, was run at the conference *Power, Values and Organisations* held at the School of Advanced Urban Studies, Bristol University.

CONTEXT

There is a deficit of democratic power for women in Europe. This is a reality which has a long history but social change and social movements in which women have played leading roles in the last twenty years have brought this issue to the fore today.

In this section we outline some of the key factors which set the framework for our research.

FEMINIST MOVEMENTS

Feminist movements in the '80's in Italy and the UK have sought to enter political institutions and gain access to decision making positions within them. In England and Italy feminists sought to introduce new mechanisms for women to work together for change inside public sector institutions and political parties at local and national levels. In order to achieve change they created mechanisms through which women in independent organisations worked with women employees and elected members within the public sector. In the UK black women and minority ethnic women organised to ensure that their specific needs were represented, and were followed by lesbian women, women with disabilities, older and younger women.

Women have made a considerable contribution towards developing a more responsive and accessible model of service delivery and more open decision making processes. Yet protagonists within current debates about the future of the public sector are uniformly male, white and identified with old outmoded ways of operating.

This research sets out to explore how women in the public sector are faring in the '90's and what their experience can contribute to current debates.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT: POLITICAL CONTEXT

The role of local government is changing within all EC member states. These changes are linked to a number of factors. The demographic changes are leading to an aging population, and political crises are leading refugees to seek asylum within the EC. In the context of recession, these and other factors are leading to increased demand for services with reduced resources to pay for them.

Government strategies for resolving this crisis include attempts to introduce market economics into the public sector, and legislation designed to reduce access to support services for refugees. These strategies have repercussions for the function and role of local government. For example in the UK where local government is associated with a tradition of local democracy, legislation has reduced the political decision making powers and resources of local authorities. Contractual relationships are being introduced throughout the public sector and these are transforming both internal relationships within public sector organisations and their relationship to service users. This has many repercussions, positive and negative. New possibilities are being opened up of establishing multi-sectoral partnerships of service providers and within this framework for specifying the requirements of women and ethnic minorities as service users.

In Italy resources available to the public sector are also being reduced, and there are similar moves towards contracting out services to the independent voluntary and private sectors. However there is a crisis of political institutions which is undermining the credibility of political representation at local and national levels.

THE CRISIS OF CREDIBILITY OF POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS

Linked to the changing role of local government is a wider crisis of credibility of current political regimes in western Europe and their ability to model a credible version of democracy. The overturning of state socialism in Eastern European regimes lends urgency to the search for new forms of democracy and practical mechanisms for building them.

Within this context women's movements have contributed their own ideas of how to interpret democracy. Current debates about the gender basis of leadership style are underpinned by feminist movements which increasingly reject notions of 'equal opportunities' and insist on difference as a basis for negotiating women's access to decision making positions within institutions. Women have drawn strength from this notion of difference in order to reshape decision making to reflect the unique contribution which women can potentially offer organisations. This contribution is associated with qualities essential to the transformational leadership style which are increasingly being promoted for leaders within organisations of the '90's.

These ideas have been taken up by women active at international level through the Council of Europe and the UN. Demands for parity in participation in the Conferences for Security and Co-operation in Europe have been made by Western and Eastern European women. The Council of Europe has resolved that member states

carry out policies designed to achieve equality between women and men in political life and in the decision making process,'such policies being based on precise short, medium and long term strategies', and has issued guidelines to national governments to work to. The United Nations 1985 Forward Looking Strategies call on national governments to 'intensify efforts to ensure equality of participation by women in all national, regional and local legislative bodies and to achieve equality in the appointment of women to high posts in the executive, legislative and judicial posts'[2] and call on governments to establish appropriate procedures 'whereby individual women as well as representatives of all types of women's interest groups, including those from the most vulnerable, least privileged and most oppressed groups may participate actively in all aspects of the formulation , monitoring and review and appraisal of national and local policies, issues and activities'. The International Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) was ratified in 1986 and contains civil/political rights for women.

These measures provide a context for national and local initiatives to promote women's access to decision making. Yet the experience of many women active in these campaigns demonstrates that progress which has always been slow may now be at a standstill[3]. Achievements have depended on initiatives from women organised outside institutions, working in alliance with women within. Many of these independent organisations have disbanded, due to cuts in funding, or demoralisation, as women feel that their energy has been sapped, for too little return.

In our research we focus on the alliances between women, which in our view are the key to bringing about real change for women within institutions.

ACCESS TO DECISION MAKING: SUCCESS OR FAILURE?

Feminist attempts to open up decision making mechanisms must be assessed within this general context. Evaluation of their effectiveness must take into account the crises within the organisations for which they were designed.

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[2]Article 87 of the 1985 Forward Looking Strategies, quoted in 'When will democracy include women?' Georgina Ashworth, Change Thinkbook V11, International reports: Women and Society, P.O. BOX 824, London SE24 9JS

[3]Delegate discussion at the Women In Power Conference, European Women's Lobby and CE Equal Opportunities Unit, Athens, November 1992

Feminists committed to securing greater access for women to decision making are now at a cross roads. They had previously aimed to increase the numbers of women in political institutions and decision making positions within the public sector. For some this was premised on the adoption of a further goal; to adopt and introduce different forms of decision making, as well as new priorities within them.

STRATEGIES

There is a growing literature in the UK on women and leadership, and women and management, within public and private sectors.[4] Its focus is to increase the numbers of women in decision making positions in organisations, on the basis that the organisation will benefit from the specific contribution women can make.

The movement for equal representation for women within political structures is based on similar ideas.[5] Women have their own political agendas and ways of organising, and for these reasons need to be equally represented within all decision making structures. Local government experience demonstrates that women have different interests, structured by inequalities of power rooted in differences of race, class, sexuality, age, disability. Alliances between women need to be negotiated, not assumed.

The context for this discussion is growing recognition that the absence of women from public bodies can no longer be justified. In the UK the government has called for public bodies to increase the proportion of women and ethnic minorities serving on public bodies. The business led Opportunities 2000 campaign calls upon private and public sector institutions to set targets for increasing numbers of women in decision making positions.

Management texts point out that there may be a match between the qualities women bring and the qualities needed by organisations of the '90's. Yet we know that women within organisations are having to negotiate a constant tension between the desire to 'be themselves' and pressures to conform to expectations in order to maintain

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[4]Within the health service a *National Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women* was set up in 1986. Since its report in 1987 a number of initiatives have been taken by the Department of Health to address the barriers women face.

[5]For example the UK *300 Group*, an all party campaign for more women in parliament, local government and public life, and the *Women into Public life Campaign*, which aims to encourage the appointment of more women to public bodies.

credibility.[6]

Can public sector organisations serve the interests of women without fundamental review? How can we ensure that the specific qualities which women bring to these positions are valued by the organisation?

The issues are complex and not reducible to a simple opposition between men and women. Some women may choose to opt into the prevailing culture of organisations, and do so because they see no alternative, or because, as individuals, they do not choose to define their experience in gender terms.[7] Many men for their own reasons reject the masculinist culture of organisations. Nor are the means of investigation straight forward; we cannot expect to find the answers to these questions by simply asking women what they think.

The starting point of this research is a primary identification with the needs of women within the organisation and with the women who are its potential service users outside of it. We approach the issues through dialogue with the women we interview, and try to tease out the complex inter- relations of power which determine their experience.

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[6]*The Sexuality of Organisations, ch. 9 'Organisations, Power and Sexuality: the Image and Self Image of Women Managers'* Sage publications, 1990 ISBN 0-8039-8231-3 pbk

[7]*In the way of women, men's resistance to sex equality in organisations,* Cynthia Cockburn, Macmillan 1991 IBSN 033354913-9

WOMEN CHANGE TIME IN ITALY[8]

The main theme of the Italian part of the research is the politics and practice developed by women during the mid- eighties to the beginning of the nineties, a period that ended with tl e 1992 general election. One of the practical outcomes of this political activity by women is the 'Law on Time'.

The protagonists were women members of the Communist Party (PCI/PDS) and others who align themselves with the analysis and objectives put forward in The Women's Travelling Charter (Carta Itinerante Delle Donne) of 1986.

THE INTERVIEWEES

WHO WE INTERVIE VED

Elena Cordoni is a member of the women's policy section of the Communist Party. She contributed to the Women's Charter and promoted and followed the development of the proposed legislati m 'Women Change Time'. The interview brings out where the idea for the project came from, the phases of development it went through before becoming proposed legi slation, and the relationships established with women both within and outside the party. The interview concludes with some thoughts on the effects produced by the Charter and the issues that it opened up for the women's movement.

Romana Bianchi was a Communist Party M.P. from 1979 to 1992. She took part in setting up GID and co-o rdinated it from 1983 to 1987. She was Equal Opportunities Minister for the Shadow cabinet from 1989 to 1992. The interview explores the debate about women's a utonomy within the Parliamentary Group of the Communist Party, women's achievements and the problems they experienced in their relationship with Parliament as an irstitution.

Nadia Caselgrandi is a consultant working for the Council of Modena, and Alfonsina Rinaldi, ex-mayor of Modena, initiated and managed the 'Time and Hours of the City' project for the city of Modena. The interview focuses on aspects of the

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[8]see the *complementary information* at the end of this chapter for contextual information

development of the project and also makes some observations on the role that a Council administration should have today.

Grazia Colombo was nominated by the Women's Group to the selection list of candidates supported by the Communist Party and in 1990 became councillor for sport, culture, education, women and youth in the Council of Novate Milanese. In the interview she pointed out that her negative experience as councillor was due to the ways in which decisions were made at an administrative level. These were so ingrained that they prevailed even with some of those women who wanted to change them.

In the case of Novate the first protagonist was the Women's Group. Now there are three protagonists: the Women's Group, Grazia Colombo who became a councillor, and Luciana Sabbadini who is a council officer. In their interview the Women's Group retraced its experience from 1990 until today: with the Party, with other women and with the still unresolved problem of 'gender representation'.

Luciana Sabbadini was Women's Group organizer together with Grazia Colombo. She is the director of the library of Novate, and works with Grazia Colombo and some other women. In the interview she focuses on the ways that women relate to each other and the relationships between women, their roles and careers.

background experience of interviewees

All of the women that were interviewed have a double political reference: they are women from the left and their politics are women-centred. Due to their age and culture they belong to the generation that has lived and directly participated in feminism. They have, therefore, a long history of political involvement.

All the interviewees are white. There were no black women active within the campaign at national or local level. The position of black women is discussed in the appendix to this chapter.

The interviews took place at a time (mid 1992) when the left in Italy was in difficulty. Women in politics were silent and the gap between citizens and parties and citizens and institutions was becoming wider and wider. All of this took its toll on the women interviewed as they had experienced high expectation of the politic activity to which they had dedicated their time, energy and passion.

The interviewees found it difficult to evaluate the results of their political work,

because of their personal involvement, at times positive, within a context which was extremely complex and intractable .

Some of the women have held and still hold positions that did not exist previously:

*   Romana Bianchi co-ordinated GID from the start of the Women's Parliamentary Group.
*   Nadia Caselgrandi became a freelance consultant for the Council of Modena with the inception of what later became the project 'Time and Hours of the City'.
*   Grazia Colombo, councillor since 1990 in Novate, is responsible for education, sport, culture, women and youth. With the Women's Group she introduced the plan Time In the City' onto the agenda of the majority group in the Council.

In all of these cases political decisions were reached which were significant because of their organisational effect as well as because of their political content.

PERSONAL OBJECTIVES

In all the interviews the interviewees' personal objectives remain in the background. It is true that there were no specific questions about them, but their absence makes one think that the interviewees do give politics a major place in their scale of values, and that within this scale they do not prioritise their personal, emotional and professional involvement.

Some of them like Romana Bianchi and Elena Cordoni have abandoned their own work in order to make politics their own profession. Nadia Caselgrandi and Luciana Sabbadini who work in Council administration identify themselves with their jobs so much 'that', as Luciana Sabbadini says, 'when I call the greengrocer I say 'this is Luciana from the library...' Both women bring to their activity a strong commitment to 'service' which increases its value.

As with the other councillors, Grazia Colombo carries out her function of elected member on top of her own profession. She is the one who weighs up results achieved against the time, energy and the involvement that is put into administration. She says: 'the town council and in general the whole system spends a lot of energy on itself, it feeds itself on its own air... this is a problem for both ·men and women administrators but my reading is that men are historically closer to bureaucratic

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administrative structures...one has to stay within the limits of the law but to get there one uses ways that are determined in corridors and behind closed doors ...'

POLITICAL OBJECTIVES

The problem to which Grazia Colombo draws our attention is that political organisations and institutions have formal rules (the electoral system, the laws, etc) and informal rules (the 'how', the process of decision making). But perhaps more so than in other organisations, knowing these informal rules and how to use them is considered to be 'the real way to conduct politics', the source of real power.

This was confirmed by Romana Bianchi as well when she talks about the functioning of Parliament: '...at this particular moment women's ability to think things through and to work is by far superior to that of men's...but in the end this does not count for much because politics consists of exchanges between the main groups within the parties and the awareness of their different points of view rather than being made up of issues and problems that relate to ordinary people..'

It is around the concept of 'politics' itself where differences emerge between women and men. These differences are not properly explored, and in the end effect the results which women would like to achieve.

To make an individual or collective change in decision making presupposes a fair knowledge of the context in which one is intervening, But the politics seems to have a 'hidden, informal constitution' which over rules the official, formal one , and this is less accessible to women.

In fact, when the objective is well defined and its implementation not too distant, women do succeed in influencing political decision making. This was the case in the general elections of 1987: the Communist Party women made the slogan of the electoral campaign 'vote woman' a policy for the whole of the party.

In spite of the consistent decrease in votes for the party, women candidates on the list obtained good results and made up 30% of Communist Party candidates elected to the Chamber of Deputies and to the Senate, whilst in those elections overall women reached 11% in the Italian Parliament.

In Novate, as well, women made up 50% of the candidates in the 1990 local elections and 40% of them were elected.

AUTONOMY AND ITS FORMS

One of the objectives of the Charter was women's autonomy and visibility in the Party and in institutions. At the same time this was a mechanism for women to develop their own political analysis.

Elena Cordoni told us how autonomy that had been fought for within the Party allowed women from the Women's National Committee, together with other women who had already worked on it from a social point of view, to work out a proposal on Time without having to wait for approval from any other lead body (unlike the Charter). Naturally this is not to say that there were no conflicts, they were just being postponed and kept open even after the proposition had been accepted by the Party. 'In reality this law is a ground for fighting and especially in the Party' says Elena Cordoni.

Some of the objections about the 'economic incompatibility' of law came from women but they were mainly made by men.

In Parliament within the group PCI/PDS, autonomy and its forms was not an issue that neatly divided women and men for or against. Romana Bianchi told us '...it was a man, Berlinguer, the secretary of the Party who first had the idea of a separate group for women... to profoundly change the way of working in Parliament'. Some women were against autonomy as were many men.

The GDI (Women's Interparliamentary Group) has been established since 1983. Women M.P.s participated on a voluntary basis; they were autonomous financially, organisationally and they had their own space. There were negotiations on the political issues: the GID was autonomous in working out legislation 'specific' to women (laws on women's clinics, sexual violence, etc) and legislation proposed by women. R.Bianchi added:
'...an important point was how decisions were made...the GID expressed its own point of view on every piece of legislation including the laws on finance. In case of disagreement, women were guaranteed an autonomous vote as well.. Women's point of view was binding and this was put to the test on an article of the law on sexual violence. Not all the women M.P.s were in agreement but in the end all of them accepted the majority opinion within the women's group, and in its turn this opinion bound the whole political group...The principle of pure democracy, one head one vote, was replaced with a procedure different to the usual one.'

Autonomy was the main issue in the Women's Group of Novate. The group negotiated with the Party that 50% of the candidates to the local Council had to be women and the Group should decide which women would be on the list. With regards to this the Group's first document said:

'If we really had reached a state of complete parity and each of us could express ourselves as an individual, we would not need to put forward such a strong proposal as that of asking for 50% of female representation on the list.

We ask for an approach based on recognition of difference because the approach that is considered 'normal' is only so for men, and for women is a process which slows us down. What we ask, therefore, is to follow a different practice for which at the moment there is no guarantee of success'.

The internal policy of the Communist Party, in whose list the Group's women were candidates, envisaged that every single candidate was voted in by Party members. The Group did not accept this rule; this created a conflict with part of the membership and as a result the leaders who originally negotiated with the women have been replaced.

'...in our opinion the list could not be divided as autonomy, freedom and representation can be approached from different points of view. We also think that voting 'name for name' is not necessarily a guarantee of democracy; this is in itself an imperfect tool, because it is used by a small section of a larger community that, being absent, cannot put forward its own opinion.'

The rules drawn up by the Group work on different principles:
'The only real guarantees are the interest that we share in the changes that the Communist Party is undergoing and the fact that we accept their electoral policy as binding '.

But the autonomy of the Group was not expressed simply by rejecting the internal rules of the Party; it also put forward its own issues for the PCI programme: '...as far as 'how to do things' is concerned we think that administration can be approached in a different way. To be brief we think that the Council administration should work in a horizontal rather than vertical way. This can happen if policy making is project orientated, and if Council committees promote the participation of citizens as interested parties in the projects; if each councillor has small groups working with the rest of the councillors; if horizontal working/co-ordinating committees are created, even for a short period, with specific objectives, (monitoring of projects, public relations and effective communication, etc)'

'Through our proposal called 'Time and Hours of the City' we planned to reorganise Novate. We wanted to work on it with women, not because we wanted to limit our perspective, but because, although it is a problem for everybody, time is a particularly intractable complex problem for women, and so we felt their point of view would be a natural reference point for initial research and intervention into this issue'.

Grazia Colombo, who was elected councillor, maintained her original commitment to changing the ways that decisions are made projects was reorganisation of schooling. In phase one In phase one the reorganisation was carried out by a council committee open to the interested parties (parents, teachers) and to officers in charge of education. All of them together examined the recommendations and at the end a decision was made which was satisfactory (new spaces were found for a new service), agreed upon and clear to everybody. But in phase two these proceedings were overturned: decision making was transferred to the majority parties. The traditional way of doing things prevailed.

POLITICAL DECISION MAKING

The locus of decision making then was moved outside the Council to people who had no right to make this decision, and only after it had been made was brought back to the appropriate place. People who did not participate in this process had to agree to it regardless. In this way the decision making process becomes murky, even if in this case it remained within the bounds of the law. Furthermore, as it effaces the presence of individuals, it also takes away their personal responsibility.

R. Bianchi said about Parliament: 'we have to rethink the level of autonomy of M.Ps, both female and male... officially this is very high but in reality M.P's are strictly bound to the decisions of their political groups. In the groups in Parliament as in the parties there is a gap between the few who make decisions and the others. I would even go as far to say that those who make the decisions are fewer and fewer.. so that the opinion of individual M.P.'s does not count at all...'

Grazia Colombo said: 'the debate as to whether in politics one should identify as a woman or as a member of whatever political party one belongs to is based on a false dilemma. For the elected woman the main thing is to carry on with the issues that seemed important at the time that they presented themselves to the people. Political programmes are a commitment that you make to the electorate. I have a responsibility because I represent my electorate within institutions, not because I represent the

institutions to my electorate. These are two starting points that imply two different ways of operating.'

'I see an articulation between individual and collective responsibility which needs rules which may not be those which have been used up till now. There is also another factor: when it is you who are in that place and having to make a decision it is different to being somewhere else and thinking about what should be done. I have my own personal responsibility towards the Women's Group as well.'

This view was shared by Romana Bianchi: 'nowadays we have to make good decisions fast, without delegating too much. We have to see that the final decision about a law for example is left up to the people who in that particular moment are in charge, this means that each of us has to assume our own responsibility...'

Even though politics has its own peculiarities, the rules that are effective for good decision making within other organisations should still be applied: comprehensive information about the system in which one wants to intervene, a definition of proposed changes, and forecast of its effects, follow up, monitoring and evaluation of the results.

But is it realistic to try to work through all these stages of decision making in institutions in the way that they work at the moment? Romana Bianchi said: 'Italian Parliament does not implement legislation and has no tools to control how it works or is implemented. The law makers do not know whether laws are implemented or what effect they have. This leads to an over production of legislation because if one law does not function they make a new one.'

It is clear that there are disfunctions in political decision making: as there is no analysis, the same decision will be taken even when there are new variables. Without evaluation of the results of the decision, the organisation does not learn anything and its decisions will become further removed from reality. Also, in the elective assemblies the individuals who make the decisions - and the places were these are made - are sometimes not the ones who are officially in charge. Often decisions are referred to the parties rather than to the elected bodies.

It is a real chain of displacements and distortions.

ALLIANCES

Even when they are present in the elective assemblies, women are rarely part of the executive committees. This makes it more difficult to have real influence on decisions.

In Modena political decision making is effective. The mayor is a woman who with the help of other women started the project on Time. Nadia Caselgrandi said: 'the power that her institutional role gave her (the mayor, Alfonsina Rinaldi) did not put male councillors and officers of the administration into conflict with her. Sometimes there was just lack of understanding and passive resistance'.

Access to formal power is important in decision making. But it is easier to make innovative political choices in relation to traditional ways of doing things in local authorities by making alliances inside institutions and outside them as well: through direct involvement of citizens (assemblies, meetings), through the image which you project (the slogan of the campaign on Time was 'the town through rose coloured spectacles'), through alliances with some of the council officers who were involved in the projects.

Forging a link between the inside and the outside (institutions, electorate) was the approach adopted in all the cases that we analyzed: it is consensus and participation that gives strength to the women.

According to Elena Cordoni, along the various stages of development of activity around the Charter, interventions by women from 'outside' were constantly sought out. The Charter was 'travelling' in order to collect followers and women who wanted to put its issues into practice: ideas, projects, observations on Time originated with the women from 'outside.' Through this process the Charter was transformed into proposed legislation, presented in Parliament and supported by the citizens signatures.

Romana Bianchi said that: 'communication with 'the outside' is one of the first issues that the elected women try to tackle... the traditional party political channels are not adequate, they are seeking new autonomous channels'.

The secretary of GID experimented with 'a direct line to the women elected' but this direct contact between electors and the women elected could not be sustained for organizational reasons, and it had to be suspended. But other activities still remain:

hearings, conferences, press conferences, a quarterly magazine and an office for monthly information".

In Novate the Women's Group periodically puts out information material to be distributed to the electorate. In her role as councillor Grazia Colombo widens political participation in council committees. She has introduced the idea that the resources that are available to the Council are not only 'inside' but also 'outside' and with the help of other female workers forms groups of citizens in the Library. These have evolved into a proper autonomous Association that concerns itself with travel, exhibitions and other activities.

In the cases we have studied every woman sought allies outside institutions, in order to add weight to decisions as well as to influence them. In particular but not exclusively, they sought out alliances with women.

POLITICAL DECISIONS AND THE ADMINISTRATIVE MACHINE

While Parliament seems to busy itself with an over-production of laws, illustrating the result of access to decision making without monitoring of their effect, in the town halls it is also difficult to make political choices and effective decisions because of the way the administration functions. This is particularly true when one wants to introduce change, or when one wants to break down the compartments that divide the various council departments.

The administration that we have studied was in power during a period when local finance underwent progressive cuts and service needs changed. Demographic, economic and social changes required reorganisation and differentiation of services.

Women have brought about most of these social changes over the last twenty five years, for example in demography, education, employment and lifestyle. Women started the project of Time, including 'Time in the City', in response to these changes. These new policies as in the case of Time in the City require new ways of working for the administrative machine .

There is strong resistance to change within public administration in Italy. This is a problem that concerns all those who want to introduce change, as in the cases of Modena and Novate. Although these two towns have different dimensions and histories they have in common the fact that they are well governed by parties from

the left. The delivery of services is good and the administration effective.

STRATEGIES

Women administrators in Modena and Novate believed that "Time and Hours in the City" could be the key to change. How did they act on this belief?

In Modena, Nadia Caselgrandi said: 'Alfonsina Rinaldi's aim was to introduce women's point of view ...as mayor she felt that she was put to the test as a woman ...during the review of the town plan we wanted to introduce other indicators besides the traditional ones: quality of life, ways of life and better use of the city's facilities. The usage of the city and its facilities should be tailored to those who have a lot to do in town (work, children, house, bills to pay), primarily women.' But how? 'it was a matter of actively involving citizens on an ongoing basis... a network of privileged referents was established: women for instance, but not only them'.

'Projects by their very nature need to be organised horizontally across the structure of city councils. This way of working was adopted by Rinaldi who did not want to delegate women's issues to a single council department... In order to tackle problems using this 'horizontal' approach council workers need to put in 'something more;' they have to meet the aims of the administration, keeping in mind those of the citizens".

'In fact groups were formed in which managers and officers took part who were the link with a similar organisation within the political structure, the political leadership group'.

The first projects were for young children, older people, and for commercial activities. They are trying to meet the needs of the service users who want high quality and 'more personalized' services at no extra cost. 'This could be achieved through reorganisation in order to make the whole structure more efficient, identifying potential synergy across council department budgets and adding a minimal investment for the staff.' 'We think that local administration should be like a workshop, where experiments can be carried out and where the best can be brought out of the local voluntary sector. The key is that the terms on which we work together are clear to everyone .'

'For us it was important to put the various players active in the city in touch with

each other. The Council does not substitute itself for groups of individuals, nor does it impose itself or necessarily manage them ...Perhaps this is the big difference with the past: to govern is to intervene at the nerve centre of a complex system, like the city is today, drawing guide-lines as points of reference for each of the key players'.

Grazia Colombo also thought about services in terms of quality and low cost. She would like the administration to share its aims with citizens and also with council officers within her areas of responsibility..

'Let's divide up the responsibilities', I have said from the very beginning to all the personnel in the council departments I represent. I have built a greater sense of dignity ...Officers were taking part in the citizens' working groups and committees and in doing so they were of help to them'.

'Political parties don't realise that working relationships with staff should not be based on political divisions but should be built on shared objectives based on loyalty........ it is true that there is a lot of discontent among council officers and this is because politicians have not cultivated the dignity that should go with the position of council employee. S/he stands for something and is not just the servant of the majority of the moment, s/he is a point of reference for the citizen to whom his/ her work is addressed'.

The actions of the women interviewed had always been on two levels: their starting point was to get individuals involved in the projects that they wanted to carry out and this way of working had its effect on the structure of the organisation and will orientate it towards decision making which is closer to the user.

RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN WOMEN

As we have seen, all the women that we interviewed sought alliances outside the organisations in which they work. But alliances and relationships established between administrators and the council officers are fundamental..

In the case of Modena and Novate the administrators have a strong relationship which is based on sharing a political project and on acknowledgment of each other's abilities.
Alfonsina Rinaldi chose Nadia Caselgrandi for the project on Time and Grazia Colombo says on this matter: 'two women who are in our Group work in my department. I feel that they give me genuine support, at the same time I believe that

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I give them a sense of self worth; it is as if they found a sense of recognition that comes not only from what I do or say but from the fact that through this we acknowledge each other '

Luciana Sabbadini agreec:
'and since Grazia became a councillor I have had a different way of looking at what one does. The difference is that we share an objective, we have a common project..'.

Grazia said: 'the library for instance has the advantages and disadvantages that a homogeneous group of women has. It is a service of high quality open to the needs of users, but at the same time the women who work there get scared of initiating a new project.... more than taking the decision, what scares them is to take responsibility.' This ambivalence is illustrated in the case of Luciana: 'the councillor for women does not have any staff and the project 'Time and Hours of the City' requires permanent workers. Luciana, who works at the library has taken on these roles because she is a woman and wants to support me and our project. This project is behind schedule because we have not received any funding.'

In short, this is once again the 'something more' which Nadia Caselgrandi was talking about. Luciana, besides managing the Library, has taken on the job of starting the Project of Time, as there were no financial resources. It is a 'something more' that she does not even expec to be recognized by the administration.

The experience of Luciana Sabbadini is significant from many points of view.
'I am seen as a person who does not allow herself to be bound by bureaucratic rules; when you deliver services you clash with the Council machine. The difficulties come in making the services remain within a machine which originally was not supposed to have them. For me what is very important is the service and the product and not the rules. My colleagues tell me that this is because I am a woman. My work gives me a lot of satisfaction. I work with a group of women that was established in the 80's, it is very homogeneous in both age and ideas, there is very strong solidarity. In a women's group very strong relationships evolve and some of these are very emotional. ..When there are problems I think we suffer more than men. It is a richness that sometimes becomes an additional motivation to work. ..and that allowed us to always give a high quality service in spite of cuts of resources ...We have all had children and took care of any absences due to child care without anybody noticing... at other times relationships between women can lead to problems which can be a negative factor.'

These problems arose when the man who was the director of the Library resigned.

Luciana who was for years practically doing the work of the assistant director and was the reference point for her female colleagues, could have taken the post of director. But she had strong reservations: 'For a year I refused to be the 'replacement', even if I was doing the job.. .I said to the councillor: I will stay to cover emergencies until someone else comes forward. I was afraid of not being able to take on anything else ...then I realized that it was absurd to work without taking money for it and without getting any recognition.'

'The new role has been a problem for me and for my colleagues. I was coming from a group of women where we were all equal, to take up a role that belonged to a man.... There have not been clashes but there were difficulties for me and for them. ..I tried to be the same as before but in reality something had changed...'

Taking up a formal 'role' is problematic for women: they are reluctant to take on a formal role and their co-workers are reluctant to recognize her in it.

The women we interviewed were strongly motivated to work and also placed a high value on relationships. This implied involvement of the whole of one's self. Could it be this need to feel the whole of one's self is involved that creates problems when a formal role is taken up, as if the prescriptive demands of the role could pose a threat to one's subjective identity and sense of self ?

And why do other women not help those who could take up these formal roles?

Here we have the loneliness that women so often experience when they take up positions in organizations that were previously occupied by men. This happens in work as well as in political organizations and institutions. Some of the difficulties noted by the Women's Group of Novate are caused by these factors. In the Novate group many women left not only because of their relationship with the party or the administration, but also because differences which they acknowledge.

Grazia Colombo felt accountable to herself, and also to the women of the Group, for ensuring that the main aim of the project was not forgotten. i.e. transparency of political /administrative decision making, which was put forward during the electoral campaign. In practice, when there was conflict with councillors on this particular point, she was abandoned by other women members of the group who were also part of the council. The 'official power' (the Party, the Council) won the day.

Grazia said:
'I felt that the world was falling apart ... that woman, who I respected and who in

my opinion has a high level of political awareness, joined the Communist Party and immediately said something like this: 'even if you could have challenged the document put forward by the majority before, now you are be bound by it'. I am still trying to come to terms with what happened, but it took too much out of me...I think that there are two problems...one is that politics has strict rules and the other is that these rules are sometimes believed to be the only ones possible. ...I believed that they were not the only ones possible and I tried, I try to put it into practice...but it is as if there is no cultural ground for real debate and political practice is sometimes outside the bounds of any negotiation and beyond any possibility of mediation. For women as well.. .This brings the main problem to light: does one locate oneself in the context of politics or in that of politicking between parties ?'

Women find themselves faced with a question that has no easy answer. They are not a homogeneous social group but half of the human race with different cultures, interests and ideas. Romana Bianchi says that in fact: 'the relationship between women and the different parliamentary groups has been established and it has been useful: it worked for many important laws but it did not work where the differences in culture, in politics, in social status were very pronounced, as for instance in the laws against sexual violence, sex education in schools and abortion'.

But problems also arose between the women who subscribed, officially at least, to the GID. ' the debates that have taken place in the party during these years has made it possible for women in Parliament to have greater freedom and to be able to express, sometimes painfully, the differences between them; mutual respect did not always result from this.'

WHAT CONCLUSIONS CAN WE DRAW?

Opinions expressed by the interviewees were various:

Nadia Caselgrandi said:
'A thought that seems to emerge from my experiences during these years is that women have to learn to acknowledge each other more, to value each other and to define their own territory. Institutions have to take notice of women's need for concrete action, building up relationships between women who are inside and outside organisations. I say this today when women's relationship to institutions seem even more problematic than in the past. And yet women have this desire, it has to be brought into play...'

Women in the Novate Group said:

Manila: 'With the experience I have now I think that I would know how to behave when confronted with a situation where there were differences between women within a collective.. .If Grazia stops being a councillor there will be no trace of our Group.'

Nicoletta: 'I hope that the Group will continue; if we want things to change then we have to be there... and structures certainly won't change just because two or three women get in ... And then not all women know how to have influence, how to change things...'

Monica: 'For us this has been an opportunity to come down to earth. When we had no understanding how bureaucracy works we had unrealistic ides of what we could achieve.'

Luciana Sabbadini said:

'Thinking back to how the Group began, and of what I hoped to achieve then, and still hope for, I believe that women can actually change things, since they are a new presence in institutions and are more alien to the old, inadequate ways of getting things done. Well, actually the ones who have a certain awareness... I never believed that women are all equal, even in the Group I was relying more on some of them than others... one needs the ability and skill... grand gestures and confrontations serve a purpose, but it is what happens afterwards that counts if we are to succeed in building anything convincing.'

Grazia Colombo said:

'The official mechanisms of political decision making often become a mere facade. Political decision making is a culture, a system.. .and if somebody puts herself outside this game she lays bare the real decision making mechanism... the lesson to be learnt from the case of the bribes paid to the politicians in Milan is this:.. .this kind of collusion serves only to cover up ways of operating which are self-destructive, and not self perpetuating, as they rely on a conspiracy of silence to hold them together.'

'If I were to begin again now, I would give more weight to a different consideration, with reference to being a women's representative inside the organisation. Today I feel that I would prefer to take this view: vote for women and then let who ever feels like it (or has the strength to stay) enter the institution. To stay inside institutions one needs a strong personal desire to do so and great stamina. It is a fact that if the four women elected had given each other more recognition and had kept a pact with one another, I am sure that in many cases we would have over ruled our opponents.'

Elena Cordoni said:
'Today as women we find ourselves in a different situation from the one when the Charter started... then we had a ready-made society, ready-made institutions and a ready-made party. Our task was to criticize and to de-construct them, as they claimed to be universal on false premises and did not represent women. Autonomy and conflict were our political tools and they proved effective... The politics of quotas, establishing equal representation, were breaking points for the political system. ..today I have my doubts. The left is breaking down, and the institutions and the state are completely disintegrating In the 90's the strength of women has no impact, it has lost its momentum, it even seems to be reducing. I think that women have to change strategy. These are thoughts that come directly from the work on Time. In this case it is the first time that on a social and economic ground women are taking action on two levels: the proposed legislation on Time is in conflict with a particular social organization but at the same time puts forward something new, aims to arrive at a new solution for both women and men. This work is both deconstructing the old agendas and constructing a new one. The women's movement has never done anything like that before, except for the work on sexuality in the 70's.'

Romana Bianchi said:
'We women have found through our experience that Parliament, as it is, is unchangeable: so are the agenda and the subjects of the order of the day, which are often dictated by external or the latest events (emergencies, dead-lines) and by the balance of power between parliamentary groups.

Women had difficulty introducing their own agendas both within Parliament and within their own political groups. If we consider that each political group is autonomous within the commission where the agenda for Parliament is worked out, it becomes evident that women as a 'separate' group would have greater strength. I think that GID is still necessary as a separate space, but should have a different way of operating from the past.

Women must think carefully about what they legislate on, they must take the lead in changing the legislative process and in cleaning up and simplifying the issues on which Parliament makes decisions. The GID has to be rethought ... it should put itself forward as a body made up of women of different origins and with different experiences in order to change the functioning of political groups and of Parliament itself.

The role that women must take on today is that of reforming political institutions in order to reform politics itself: this is the new perspective. The example of the

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proposed legislation on Time is significant. In Parliament a full discussion has not been possible. ..another route has been chosen, which was to incorporate parts of the Law on Time into various other pieces of legislation and this had significant results with regard to parental leave, pensions, work timetables ...the part that is already law concerns Time Planning, and this potentially could be a tool that might change lifestyles, and how cities are organized. This is an example of what I consider to be a strong 'issue' for politics, but certainly it has to reckon with council fragmentation and the fact that local administration needs women with great management skills.'

KEY POINTS

WOMEN AND DECISION MAKING IN POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS

From the data we have collected it can be seen that the relationship between women and political decision making in Italy is more problematic in the 90's than it was in the 80's. The general atmosphere is uneasy and the crisis within traditional political parties and the political system may disadvantage women who belong to those parties. Women were the first to want to change politics, but today others to the right of the political spectrum are the champions of political change.

Furthermore, the women we interviewed refer to the Communist Party (PDS) as a party in great turmoil and difficulty, as is the left in Italy and in Europe.

They feel the need to reconsider their strategy and to look for stable structures through which they can make contact with women from other countries, and find a common political policy for the next European elections.

STRATEGIES

In Italy the 'quota' strategy cannot be abandoned, as at national level in the 1992 elections women are back at 7%; this percentage is far from constituting that 'critical mass', at which, according to Drude Dahlerup[9], a minority can modify and change its level of power within political organisations and institutions.

Numbers count but as such do not guarantee significant change; the same researcher brings to light the fact that in Norway, Denmark and Sweden politics are still dominated by men, even though in Parliament and the Town Councils women have between a quarter and a third of the seats. The political culture and the ways organisations and institutions function have not changed.

The experience of Romana Bianchi in the Italian Parliament leads us to the same conclusion. From her point of view, even the establishment of GID (Women's Inter-parliamentary Group) within the PCI/PDS Group, which votes autonomously and whose vote is binding for the whole Group when it comes to laws on women, has not brought lasting results. The Group has influence in some areas of decision making but

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[9]*Da una Piccola a una Grande Minoranza,* Drude Dahlerup, in *Il Genere della Rappresentanza,* M.L. Bocccia and I. Peretti, Materiali e Atti 10, CRS, Roma, 1988.

has not changed the political agenda or the ways in which decisions are made in Parliament or within the Group itself.

WOMEN AND DEMOCRACY

This example leads us to reconsider our experience of democracy and of political representation.

Formal equality denies gender difference, which in society at large constitutes a disadvantage for women.

Women have begun to become active in their own right on the political scene and this raises theoretical and practical issues which are still unresolved:

- through what organisational forms should women express their political identity?
- through which new forms of political representation could women make their presence felt within institutions?

Our research indicates that women need to challenge plans to reform institutions, Parliament and Local Authorities included, and to develop their own proposals. This would be a new departure for women, though women's criticism and autonomous organisation did play an important part in previous years.

This raises more questions. Women are not a homogeneous social group. Their needs, culture and interests are different (as are men's). So what kind of organisation can accommodate this diversity?

In some cases in the Italian Parliament women belonging to different parties came to an agreement to pass laws 'on women', for example the law on Equal Opportunity. In other cases, where culture and political affiliation 'divided' them, it was not possible to reach agreement..

PROPOSED LEGISLATION ON TIME:
an example of the new women's politics?

The women we interviewed had a strong sense of being caught up in significant social and political change. They felt as if they were the subject of change in a society caught between the old and the new, in which institutions and organisations 'have' to change otherwise they will find that they have lost their purpose and become

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ineffective.

Women's status in society and in politics is tied to the ways in which production and reproduction are linked in society. The division of labour based on sex is also the organising principle on which social, cultural and symbolic structures are based. The social organisation of time also derives from this principle. The realignment of life time, work time and time in the city is the project which connects the women we interviewed.

It began, said Elena Cordoni, with the autonomy women of the Communist Party have won within the party, and with the relationship between women inside and outside the party. This way of working allows women to 'transform' what they produce in a social context into a political proposal. Developing a positive relationship between women inside and women outside institutions is very important for every strategy which women adopt in relation to political decision making. It becomes a 'political' tool for the promotion of cultural change, changes in lifestyle and the organisation of the city.

This proposed legislation on Time 'puts on trial' social organisation for women and men.

BARRIERS:
political decision making within national and local institutions.

The women we interviewed have highlighted some problematic areas within political decision making. Even when one is inside an institution (as an MP or as a councillor) it is difficult to understand who makes decisions, and why. Within political groups, decisions are often presented (in Parliament or City Councils) for formal agreement to the very people who should have been involved in the decision making process. Political agendas are drawn up in meetings of group leaders, where often it is the priorities of political groups that win out. This is a problem that touches men and women elected to the institutions. They often feel that they are outside decision making processes and therefore do not feel directly 'responsible'.

Political institutions have emerged from a less complex society and seem unable to follow the steps which are needed for effective decision making: Diagnosis, which should be informed by clear information about the system in which we plan to intervene; the decision, which should take into account all the available options and their likely effects; the action that has to be taken; and evaluation of the results.

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But is this kind of decision making possible within the institutions of today, and the way that they function in reality? Romana Bianchi said: 'Italian Parliament is not responsible for implementing legislation, has no means of controlling how they are implemented or how they function... Legislators do not know whether laws have been implemented or what effective they produce. As a result there is an over production of legislation because if one law does not work they just make another one.'

NEW DECISION MAKING MODELS IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT:
time and hours in the city

The initiation and management of the Time in the City project has exposed the ways in which the content of decisions is bound up with the process through which they are made.

In Novate the aim of the Women's Group and of the woman elected councillor who is introducing new ways of working into the administration, is to change the process through which political decisions are made:

- the political decision should be made with the citizens who are affected and the officers who have to implement it, by considering the various interests in play and alternative solutions. Decisions made should be transparent and 'public', no more decisions made behind closed doors, by political representatives or majority groups.

- this way of operating would change the way local authority officers work, as they would be put in direct contact with service users. This method identifies who is responsible and divides up tasks: the executive councillor makes the political decision, the officer is responsible for its application.

In Modena, the woman mayor who initiated the project 'Time in the City' found that she needed to make changes in the way the council machinery worked in order to progress. In this case as well, a network of external reference points was set up, such as associations and trade unions. Inside the organisation inter-departmental groups were established, consisting of the elected councillors and project groups of officers, with corresponding groups at political level.. The link between citizens and council officers has made political decisions easier to reach and more transparent.

In the cases we have considered, women administrators made political decisions by getting to know the context in which they are working, (surveys and consultation programmes in Modena and direct contact with people interested in Novate); defining

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their interventions (reorganisation and opening of new services), within a context of decreasing financial resources. They paid attention to ways of working, to process.

The women we interviewed think that city councils should have a new role: to respond to new demands made by their service users for more personalised, quality services, in a context of financial cuts. To govern means to make the best use of human and financial resources inside and outside the Council. The council should be seen as a 'workshop' that does not manage everything itself, but creates a network of people interested and 'intervenes at the nerve centres of the complex system that is the city today.' (Caselgrandi).

The council machine strongly resists anyone who want introduce 'changes' of any kind, and also in the way services are managed. Officers find their work is facilitated if they are involved in drawing up projects developing them with citizens and with political decision makers. This makes the relationships and division of responsibility clearer between women elected members and officers.

WOMEN IN CONFLICT:
decision making and decision makers

In the background of all the interviews there is a sense of weariness, a feeling that the personal cost of their involvement has been high. Although all of the women interviewed have worked with other women and established support networks and alliances, they often found themselves alone or a small minority in a context that had strong male characteristics. Their project, to become 'visible' as women, meant that they were constantly under stress, feeling under scrutiny, and having to tackle conflict with their political party, the organisation, and also with other women.

The same situation arises in other organisations in which women are present as well. Often women do not assert themselves, not only because there is resistance around them but also because of their own ambivalence about asserting themselves, weighing up obtaining recognition for themselves against the responsibility and the obligations to which this would lead .

In order to increase women's access to decision making (i.e. to power) we need further more in depth research into the relationship between women, power, roles and authority. We need training programmes to promote women's development through shared experience.

COMPLEMENTARY INFORMATION

BLACK WOMEN IN ITALY

In contrast to England, Italy has until recently been a country of emigration, rather than immigration. Political refugee status was not recognised until 1990.

There is little data on black women in Italy. The data which does exist relates to immigration. There are very few black women in decision making positions. Immigrant communities are marginalised and there seems to be little contact between women within them and indigenous feminist groups. Contact has been established by church based voluntary groups and by trade unions, but their work has not been the subject of this research.

In the last 15 years women have made up 50% of immigrants, mainly coming from the Philippines, Salvador, Eritrea, Mauritius and the Seychelles. Many of these women are single and work as domestics, and sometimes have young children who have been born in Italy or who have joined them from their countries of origin. Aside from Italian language classes there is little provision for them. Local authorities are beginning to provide orientation courses and to target women specifically.

WOMEN'S TRAVELLING CHARTER

The word 'travelling' originated from the way in which the Charter took shape: it was started by women belonging to a political party (PCI) it then went to other women and returned strengthened by new ideas and by the participation of new women who were interested in the project. It was a circular process that can be synthesised into the slogan: 'women's strength comes from other women'. It examined how, although society was becoming more and more 'feminine', politics was still very much in the hands of men.

The general aim of this project was to renew politics by including women who historically had been excluded from public decision making,. The Charter also had intermediate aims: a guaranteed quota of women representatives in politics and the autonomy of those elected, so that they had a larger influence within decision making.

According to the project, these aims, if implemented, could change the actual content of the political agenda and decision making; the 'Law on Time' could be considered,

from the point of view o^ its content and ideas, a result of that process.

The process initiated by the Charter has to be seen in the context of the Communist Party, the political party from which it originated. This is for various reasons: in Italy there is an historical connection between the parties of the left and feminism which has manifested itself in conflicts, separations and reunions but which never totally disappeared. It was with n the Communist Party that women during the eighties had the biggest visibility in numbers as well as in 'voices'. Those were the years in which political organisations with very rigid structures (as for example the Communist Party with its vast number of officials, its organisation which was the same all over the Italian nation, its 'funnel' structure which converged vertically in the centre, and its decision making from the centre to the periphery) were showing signs of difficulty with falling membership and the popular vote. The crisis of this kind of organisation was brought about by social change, the presence of new political subjects, and the new perception of what politics was all about .

It is this fairly long phase of progressive de-structuring of the party, of its political culture and internal rules (democratic centralism) and of its organisation, which ended · in 1989/1990, that converted the Communist Party (PCI) into the Democratic Party of the Left (PDS).

Within the traditional party organisation the 'women' problem was just one amongst many other social issue. They were on the political agenda (in fact the various social problems were each dealt with by a specific committee) and the majority of women members were delegated to women's committees.

With the Charter, women broke down that former organisation and affirmed their own autonomy, in order to emphasise that the party, as is the case in many other aspects of political life, makes a false claim to represent universal interests, for women and men, and is in reality dominated by men.

The transformation of the party initiated new movements but at the same time caused splits and divisions between women, even between those who had written the Charter and who were sharing the common aim of working towards autonomy.

PROPOSED LEGISLATION:
'WOMEN CHANGE TIME'

The text presented in parliament said:
'Women experience time in a different way to men, but it is on men's experience that the way of thinking and of organising society is based; and this kind of society, as far as its jobs, time, symbols and material organisation are concerned, still considers the female sex to be complementary to men.

The 'division of labour' is still based on gender.
Caring and housework is done by women, even by those who work. In the world of work one still finds that the majority of women work in the productive sphere and that traditional women's jobs (school, health, public administration) are undervalued.

The division of labour based on gender is not only an organisational principle, but is a cultural and symbolic feature that determines what is important, what is public and what is private; what is the predominant organising principle of time (work time) and the of hidden time (for caring, for oneself). Also, in the city the organisation of the services, the rhythm of life and of the working day show that the organisation is still based on the old industrial pattern where everything revolved around production.'

The proposed legislation takes into account the above points and deals in particular with:

- how we organise time throughout our life cycle:
  It proposes periods of work during schooling, periods of study and training, and leave for parental, family and personal reasons during working life. It also proposes that during military service young men should spend at least three months in caring jobs as part of their training.

- how work time is organised.
  It proposes a reduction or working hours to 35 hours per week for women and men working in public and private services and proposes that overtime should be done only exceptionally and voluntarily; new regulations for night work and recovery time; 4 weeks paid holiday in both the public and private sectors.

- how time in the city is organised.
  It proposes that the Councils, in order to reshape the way urban is organised,

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should co-ordinate and re-order all the timetables of their cities with a 'time planning scheme', after having consulted in particular single women as well as those with partners, and proposes that Councils should offer the option of either paying rates or of giving their time in caring services.

In our research we concentrate on the Council of Modena as an example of putting into practice 'Time in the City' and the Council of Novate which is considering a time planning scheme.

LOCAL AUTHORITY WOMEN

THE INTERVIEWEES

Data was collected through a series of group discussions and individual interviews with women refugees, women employees (officers) and women elected members. The officers included two senior managers (first and second tier), and five project officers, who were invited to take part. Invitations to project officers were circulated to members of the refugee forum. Elected members included a deputy leader, vice chair, and committee member. Officers and members all have responsibility for equal opportunities work, community development or anti poverty work. Refugees were from the Kurdish, Vietnamese, Somali,and Eritrean communities. All five of them were in advocacy roles, paid or unpaid; several were working from local community centres.

One of the elected members, and three of the officers were black women.

Interviewees were selected on the basis of their involvement in working in the field of equalities, community development, or on refugee issues. Participation was in work time for officers, and was entirely voluntary.

Background material was collected through discussion with members of the Labour Women's Council, a senior manager at a London wide refugee organisation, and from 'Women Lead', a conference of women in local government organised by the Women in Local Government Network.

COMMON GOALS ?

All the women interviewed shared certain basic values. These could be described loosely as a commitment to equal opportunities for women and black people, and to working in partnership with people in local communities. They had taken up their roles determined to translate their personal commitment into practical application, within their area of work. All of them have experienced dramatic change in powers, role, and general expectations of what they can deliver since they took up their responsibilities. Most of them feel they are increasingly having to compromise their own values in order to continue their work, and that their personal integrity is in jeopardy. As a result those within the local authority are now experiencing high degrees of frustration and distress, as the jobs they had set out to do seemed no

longer compatible with the cultural norms of the local authority, or with its political priorities. They have adopted various strategies to cope with this.

The expectation of a shared value base in this particular local authority arises from a shared history, in which commitment to community development and equal opportunities were high on the political agenda, and part of the public political profile of elected members. Of course this did not always come up to expectations, and conflicts abounded within the organisation and between women in the three roles we are focusing on. The effect of government legislation and of changed political priorities within the Labour Party nationally has been to remove this shared frame of reference. The feeling of betrayal and of failure is not confined to women, but expressed through feelings of loss and despair in relationships between those who were party to this shared commitment to change.

Survival is a real issue for all the women interviewed. For refugees, physical survival for women and men within their communities, and financial survival for the projects for which they work. For the employees, survival as employees in a situation where economic stringency and shifting political priorities could lead at any moment to redundancy. For elected members, political survival in a situation where intervention by central office has already suspended eleven of their colleagues, and where being identified with working on women's equality working with local communities no longer fits the party image. Their preoccupations now are 'how can we live with the next five years of conservative government?'

Despite these difficult circumstances, they expressed high levels of commitment to exercising the power that they do have in ways which are compatible with their values. They are each struggling to reconcile their original goals with the current reality of what is possible within the context in which they are working.

CONTRASTING REALITIES

When asked to describe their hopes and dreams for what they could achieve, most officers simply laughed. They found the contrast between the current reality and what they had hoped to achieve difficult to bear:

'I feel a token figure; expected to cover everything when this is impossible; women are invited to take part in the refugee forum just to look good, but without powers to change anything' (refugee officer)

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'community development is about support and communication within the council as well as within the community. The community development team has been reduced from twenty five when I came fourteen years ago to two posts for the whole borough now'

'in my previous job I was involved in all kind of women's networks within the community; here I just get on with my work' (welfare rights worker)

'since reorganisation the women's unit has lost its focus; our remit for employment was removed, since members perceive this (employment work) as unwanted 'interference' in management' (equalities unit)

'we used to advise other council officers and the voluntary sector. Our remit to advise the voluntary sector has been removed'

This feeling of powerlessness was shared by members interviewed.

Two of the elected members interviewed had taken on their role as a development of their community activism in the borough. They saw themselves as continuing their work to tap into skills that women have and to empower women in local communities by building on their talents and making their living conditions better. They were having difficulty reconciling this with the current reality of decisions they were having to make, in particular to reduce resources available to community groups:

'I feel I am a lone voice on the need for women to work in partnership; my colleagues do not understand this. We organised a conference for the local community, and out of this drew up a community development strategy. These should have been taken forward by our senior officer, but she was taken up with restructuring, which deleted the community grants committee, and introduced massive cuts..... '

They felt that the priority should be improving services and that this should be reflected in the work of equalities officers, who had succeeded in implementing mechanisms to protect women employees from discrimination. This was in line with the new priority within the majority group, and current emphasis by both labour party and the conservative government nationally. As equalities officers pointed out, this view does not address barriers experienced by women employees in using these mechanisms, or the undermining effect these barriers have in enabling women to delivery quality services.

Political priorities had changed over the previous eighteen months, in particular towards equal opportunities, but these changes had not been openly acknowledged. There was a lack of commitment to the equal opportunities strategy which had been previously adopted, by the majority of councillors and senior managers. Elected members tended to respond to lobbying, but resisted adopting a corporate approach. The result was a reduction in resources allocated to equalities work, and the reorganisation which downgraded the women's unit to a team within an under staffed equalities department. The fact that elected members would not acknowledge this change of priorities effectively left senior managers responsible for integrating equal opportunities into the mainstream of corporate policy without resources to deliver. This situation took its toll on the credibility of the senior manager and on relationships between he and her staff, and has undermined trust between equalities staff and elected members.

BARRIERS

ELECTED MEMBERS

Equal opportunities had simply been dropped as a political priority, and members of the equalities committee felt they were now able only to limit the damage which their colleagues might bring about. In- fighting, acrimony, wheeling and dealing within the party, and political ambition on the part of individual members undermined solidarity between women councillors, and distanced the community. Male councillors in particular were cited as belittling attempts to raise equal opportunities issues at committee meetings. Hours were long and unsociable and positive feedback scanty as members were criticised for being unable to meet n expectations of staff or community.

Nevertheless these councillors stated they remain out of a sense of loyalty to the black and working class women they were elected to serve.

WOMEN OFFICERS

Women officers felt that recent reorganisation had increased their marginalisation within the council structure. They identified the following key factors:

* cuts in funding: fewer resources for services, and for community projects, many of which have had to close
* the new management priorities: 'efficiency, economy, effectiveness and

accountability'; the slogan 'give managers scope to manage' which they felt was allowing them to drop the equalities agenda, and move away from work with local communities

* streamlining: this has removed some of the internal consultation procedures, which equalities staff relied upon to advise members of the implications of policy reports.
* reduced political commitment to equalities work
* distancing from the local community, less day to day contact with community organisations or the local voluntary sector
* a macho, competitive, aggressive empire building culture at senior management level
* not enough senior women managers

The officers saw themselves as trying to 'build accountability downwards and outwards', but being blocked by senior managers, eg in their efforts to work in partnership with the voluntary sector in service provision. This block was located in the prevailing culture as well as identified with specific senior managers. However it was felt there might be other departments where more positive approaches were being developed, as a response to legislation which required local authorities to consult with service users, and allowed them as purchasers to invite the local voluntary sector to tender for services. This more positive approach was, they felt, likely to be grounded in financial stringency: (it would be more economical to contract services out to the voluntary sector); or legislative requirement, in contrast to the former political commitment to equalities, or meeting community needs.

One senior manager referred to her own commitment to partnership with the voluntary and community sectors. She saw this as part and parcel of her commitment to equality and understood this as dialogue, shared discussion on how they could work together, both on service development and on wider political issues. She has floated at corporate management team broad concepts on how this could work in terms of encouraging openness towards the community throughout the directorates. Her proposals have been met with active opposition from some senior managers, lack of support from others. She identifies the major obstacles as follows:

* the inward looking nature of the council, focusing on inter directorate strife, laying blame.
* the resistance to developing a corporate approach to service development
* opposition to structural change designed to develop inter- directorate links
* lack of firm political direction on these issues
* financial constraints which have recently increased

*   tensions arising from the introduction of split purchaser/ provider functions within directorates

The following comments by women officers express their experience of what it is like to be a woman below senior management level, attempting to work in partnership with community based organisations, and to initiate change: 'There is no bottom up accountability, and no accountability to the community; attempts to build forums for joint work with the voluntary sector have been squashed by managers'. 'There is no scope to change anything, and proposals for new policies are not credited to women who develop them, and are blocked by managers who take the credit for their work.' 'There is an appearance of commitment to change, but no account is taken of what you say.' 'Overall council objectives are to cut spending. Managers are encouraged to manage within the principles of 'economy, efficiency and effectiveness'.'Equality has been dropped off the agenda'. 'Staff are counted as part of the council machine, there is not room for feelings or thoughts or ideas' 'Management priority is pounds, shillings and pence, getting more outputs for the same input'

WOMEN REFUGEES

Interviewees were working as paid or unpaid community workers, doing advice and advocacy work within their own communities from community centres, and in one case a short stay hostel. They all described feeling overwhelmed by demands for their services. Sometimes this meant there was no time to focus on the needs of women, since often the men were more vocal and forthcoming, and expecting to be served by advice workers. Often the casework approach was felt to encourage dependency. Sometimes there was little support from within their own projects for focusing on women's needs, even where, as in one case, this was a specific job brief. They found that women who came for practical help were often experiencing intense grief and loss; they needed counselling as well as practical advice, services for which they were not trained and lacked time to develop. Many statutory agencies used centre workers as an interpreting service; this was time consuming for the staff, but saved the statutory agencies the cost of employing their own. Barriers interviewees were facing were:

*   limited resources within their own projects
*   limited resources within statutory agencies, who relied on refugee projects to make up for this
*   lack of understanding within their own communities about the specific needs of women, and sometimes hostility within their own communities to helping women become independent

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The refugee workers identified isolation and dependency on male family members as two of the main barriers which women refugees face. These problems are sometimes compounded by the attitudes of professionals within the host community:

*   most refugees live on housing estates where they do not feel safe or able to leave their houses
*   women are stuck at home with childcare responsibilities, unable to seek training or to attend English language classes. Their husbands go out and acquire skills, and the women become increasingly dependent on the men.
*   older women in hostels do not speak English and are reluctant to learn
*   some women are too frightened to come to meetings, or even to contact an advice worker; they may be suffering physical or mental abuse and do not know their rights
*   some professionals are reluctant to use interpreters, even where they are available, relying on family members
*   some professionals have asked for women's husbands' consent, unnecessarily and illegally. eg for a termination of pregnancy

STRATEGIES

Within these difficult circumstances, women officers, members and refugees were all taking initiatives of their own.

ELECTED MEMBERS

Some women elected members, feeling blocked by senior managers concerning community consultation, were using their own network outside the decision making party structure to try to get heard by committee chairs and elicit a response from officers. A black councillor made regular contact with black women officers as a way of gaining a different perspective on policy issues, and in order to support them in their work. This was difficult, since it meant cutting through the line management structure and making herself directly accessible to staff lower down the hierarchy.

Black and white women councillors had in previous regimes successfully taken practical initiatives within schooling, immigration controls, homelessness. In the current regime women councillors described themselves as divided by political difference and attitudes to politics. Political ambition and opportunism were said to divide women within the current administration more than differences of identity such as race or sexuality.

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OFFICERS

Women officers have developed informal networking to replace the formal consultation mechanisms which were abolished in the interests of 'streamlining'; this while not consistently reliable has had to replace the former obligation to consult the women's unit on the implications for women of policy initiatives. However their networking initiatives are limited; there is little networking across departments, and little time devoted to it beyond the immediate day to day contact which is directly related to work in hand. Officers felt they would not be allowed to meet in working hours, and that domestic commitments made it too difficult for them to meet outside working hours. The trade union, Nalgo, has a women's group, but this is not well attended.

Interviewees had played a major role in a number of practical initiatives designed to open up contact with members of local communities, including refugees. Officers in the housing section had set up a specialist advice service for refugees. Equalities officers were pressing elected members to carry out their manifesto commitment to hold open advisory forums for targeted groups: women, black and ethnic minorities, lesbians and gay men, and people with disabilities, to voice their needs directly to officers and members. The community development officer had drawn up recommendations for a 'community development strategy' designed commit service directorates to establishing ongoing consultations with members of local communities. She had initiated a refugee forum, designed to involve refugee groups and officers in jointly working out a strategy for meeting the needs of refugee communities. These initiatives even though related, were often unknown to women within different sections, and came to light through the research interview.

SENIOR MANAGERS

Senior managers adopted and were identified with different styles. One felt the only way to insert her own agendas within the aggressive, competitive wheeling and dealing was to take advantage of the frequent dispute between senior managers, to play one off against the other. Another felt she had very definitely not adopted the prevailing macho, top down style, and had succeeded in gaining respect and credibility on the basis of her own participatory style. 'At the beginning people made assumptions that I was weak, but now I am respected and have established the authority which matches my position. A lot of this hinges around making decisions, and being accountable for them, so they understand it is a matter of style as opposed to being unable to make decisions'. Important factors in establishing this authority for her were the kinds of working relationship she had established with her boss, for

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whom she deputised, and the political leadership. Her boss, who is a black man, saw the importance of modelling a good working relationship, in order to challenge sexist and racist stereotypes which were undermining to both of them. They interpreted their working relationship as a division of labour, rather than a relationship based on authority.

The fact that they shared the same aims and values made it easy for them to act consistently, even though their styles were in complete contrast.

REFUGEE WOMEN

Interviewees were all actively working to provide access to statutory services for women and men within their communities. This included accompanying women to appointments, providing interpreting and advocacy within the range of services, including health, welfare and social services, housing and education. One had set up a weekly session in a local community centre. Another had secured funding for a number of classes and self help projects. Another was employed on a time limited contract to work with women within her community, working from the project's own centre.

Two of the interviewees had to negotiate opposition from male members of their community, in one case from within the centre as well. Within one of the longer established communities, the worker had found ways to reach women through their male family members, and of working with the men to encourage them to accept greater independence for women.

NETWORKING/ ALLIES

INSIDE THE ORGANISATION:
officers and elected members

For women officers, style and political priorities were linked. They felt themselves to be on the receiving end of decisions taken 'at the top', without consultation, resulting in a deprioritising of their work. For senior managers there were two separate issues: management style, and the political decision making processes, which they may be able to influence, but over which they had no direct control. For them, as for elected members, there was scope for common ground in style, how they exercised power, and how they approached the decision making process, which did

not necessarily extend to common ground in day to day political priorities.

In what follows we explore the mismatch of perceptions between women in different roles all of whom are committed to progressing equalities issues. All have a history of working closely with community based organisations, either previous to taking up their current roles, or concurrently, i.e from within their current role as elected members, council officers, or community workers within refugee communities.

Women officers felt that managers were opposing their attempts to build voluntary sector and community sector involvement. They felt that they had developed ways of working in order to be effective, which were in conflict with the prevailing culture of the organisation. This was to work across sectors and disciplines, networking within the community and council.

Some felt the basis of alliance with women in the community had been removed: 'we don't know what to tell people since we haven't been able to deliver what they asked for'. Funding has been cut for many women's projects and few projects remain to work with.

They hoped that the new political initiative to set up Advisory Forums for members of targeted communities (black and ethnic minority, women, people with disabilities, lesbians and gay men) might provide a mechanism for re establishing closer working with communities toward, specific goals. Elected members who were committed to the project hoped they would provide a mechanism to re establish community links. Others expressed scepticism on the grounds that they would simply raise expectations which could not be met by the council.

Did they feel able to count on women managers for support in this situation? Women senior managers were seen as potential allies for changing the culture of the organisation, and as need ng support to effect change. At the same time, they were seen as vulnerable, under attack as politicians, and having to fight for survival on the corporate management team. This led to an ambivalence towards potential allies. One potential ally, for example, was seen as unreliable: not strong enough to hold her own and therefore unable to deliver. Others were felt to be threatened by the old boy network, 'men protect men and sacrifice women to protect themselves' Because of this, they could not be relied upon to provide support; some were felt to prioritise pleasing their male boss to protect their own positions 'even at the expense of their women staff'. Some of them were seen to use a 'woman to woman' style of managing women, and then to 'come down heavy as managers'.

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One of these senior women managers was seen as a specific target for hostility, and this was seen to symbolise both an attack on her style of management, which does not conform to the prevailing macho culture, and an attack on equal opportunities and community development work, for which she had specific responsibility. Officers were unsure how to interpret her refusal to confront this publicly: was it a failure on her part to assess the danger she was in? They saw her as in danger of being outmanoeuvred by male senior officers and elected members who wished to discredit her in order to justify dropping their commitment to equalities work, and were afraid this would leave them unprotected and vulnerable to attack.

The senior officer in question had a different perception of the situation. She had previously had to come to terms with her own distress at seeing politicians drop their commitment to equal opportunities, shortly after her appointment, leaving her effectively unable to carry out her responsibilities. Far from feeling victimised in her current situation, however, she felt she had initiated changes in her role designed to extend her power and influence within the corporate management team. She felt she had succeeded in increasing her credibility within male dominated departments, on the basis of her own participatory management style, and had resisted expectations to conform to the 'top down' approach to which they were accustomed and which they adopted themselves. She felt relationships between the three women members of the corporate management team were too competitive to be useful for support purposes, and that differences between them were too great to construct a common agenda. Support from women lower down the ranks was vital to her well being, but sometimes clouded by expectations which could not always be met.

The mismatch between her perception of the situation and that of women at more junior levels highlights a major barrier which prevents women from making effective alliances. Lack of communication between women in different roles feeds mistrust arising from inequalities of position power within the organisation. One of the roots of this mistrust seems to be confusion about the limits of power within which woman in each of these roles is working.

The dynamic might be summarised as follows:
* senior woman manager becomes a 'symbol' for less senior women, especially if there is a mutually co-operative working relationship/value consensus
* the 'symbolic' role includes a projection of frustration experienced by less senior women which is due to their comparative powerlessness
* less senior women wish to see the senior woman manager act out the confrontation / battle in a way which can be seen by them and which responds to their comparative frustration

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*	senior woman manager has assessed the risk level and personal cost involved and decide that is too high. This decision is not shared as she is well aware of the wishes of less senior woman, and of their comparative lack of knowledge of the climate at senior management level
*	overall dynamic leads to disappointment and further frustration on the part of less senior women and loss of credibility on the part of the senior woman manager

This theme of mismatch in expectations is taken up by women elected members. Officers felt women councillors were not using their power to give clear instruction to officers, but complaining about them behind their back. Yet some women councillors often seemed unclear about decision making processes, and their role within them. Conflicts between officers and members working on equalities issues have been experienced by both as about conflicting political priorities, and where officers felt a lack of clear political direction, members appeared to feel they had insufficient power to direct. Members of the equalities committee felt marginalised and unable to adequately defend the agenda they had been elected to carry out, a minority voice within a political group which had changed direction. This agenda had been based on 'working in partnership' with women in local communities, and equal opportunities for women, black and ethnic minorities, people with disabilities, lesbians and gay men. They found themselves now on a committee which they feel is not taken seriously. A black councillor said black officers saw her as an oppressor, selling out. She dealt with this by making herself accessible to them, gathering information and encouraging them to confide in her about what was happening on the ground.

The material suggests that women within this local authority do network together for support purposes, but that they have difficulty in establishing a basis for working in alliance across different roles, either within the organisation, or across its boundaries. Relationships between women in different roles within the organisation seem fragmented by distrust and feelings of betrayal. This is not surprising in the context of compromises which women in each different role are having to make in order to survive within their organisation. Women look to each other with desire for practical support, and expectations of a shared value base, and feel betrayed when this is not forthcoming. On the other hand they do provide personal support, and sometimes manage to sustain this across differences of role and priorities. For example a women senior manager described the solidarity expressed by a woman elected member who acknowledged her position as only woman senior manager within the 'boys club'. One elected member described support- giving between women elected members, who might be in political disagreement; 'we don't normally talk about specific policies,

or politics; we do talk about what we're doing with our lives'. She described herself as seeking out allies among women or men because of their individual qualities, common values or politics, or simply because she felt comfortable with them. 'It's the individual that's important, not whether they are male or female.' The basis might be a shared value base, a common history, or for tactical alliances a more limited shared view of the specific issue in question.

On the whole women relied on networks of women outside the organisation to provide support. For example, there is a well functioning network of women senior managers in local government, which is a primary source of support for the senior managers interviewed, and which provides for personal support and shared learning from work experience.

OUTSIDE THE ORGANISATION:

WOMEN REFUGEES

Women refugees, like the women officers, met for the first time through the research. Only one was part of a formal network, of women working within her refugee community throughout London. None of them identified specific support people. They drew their support from disparate sources: from within their project, or hostel; and sometimes from women in other agencies, although reference was made to these disappearing due to funding cuts. They had very little information about local authority services, and none about the role of the women's unit, with which contact had been limited to funding issues, and latterly cuts in funding. They were not in touch with a women's health strategy group active within their area, even though much of their time was taken up with problems women had with dealing with health professionals. They drew their support from within their own communities, except for the women's project worker, for whom support was limited to women who were divorced or unmarried, since others felt her work to be too threatening.

A CASE STUDY

The research plan itself highlighted many of the barriers which discourage women in the three subject roles from working together.

Women officers felt too vulnerable to agree to the research plan for this case study, which projected a joint meeting with refugee women and elected members. They were afraid this would repeat previous unpleasant experiences when they were attacked by

women in community organisations for not agreeing to their demands, and scapegoated by councillors. They felt elected members might make decisions which there were no resources to carry out, and leave them to take the blame. On the other hand they expressed anger and frustration that without the presence of elected members, they would be powerless to make anything happen, and delighted at the idea of wording an invitation which elected members would be unable to refuse.

One exception to this view was that of the community development worker, the only officer who did not feel it was her role to offer solutions, but rather to offer herself as a resource in a joint endeavour to address the issues.

Women refugees were also ambivalent at the prospect of a meeting with elected members. They felt this would require more work, to collect information to present to them about the needs of women within their communities, and that while this would be a useful exercise, in reality it would not be easy to carry out. A survey would be time consuming and might lead to more demands from women for services which would increase the stress for workers. Getting access to information from women would not be easy.

In the event the research plan had to be abandoned. The three subjects involved all perceived the proposed working session as a conflict situation, in which they would potentially come under attack. The barriers which prevented women from working across organisational roles were too great to allow them to meet. It became clear that to have carried it out would have amounted to a piece of development work, beyond the resources of the project.

POWER AND DIFFERENCE

A different model of power emerges from the discussions with interviewees: enabling, empowerment, sharing, as opposed to top down, controlling, territorial. This model seems to represent a shared ideal, rather than a current reality, and is at the base of the various practical initiatives which interviewees have taken part in as an expression of their personal goals. Officers expressed this in terms of discomfort with the current reality, as much as in positive terms, as a real alternative. For the senior managers, a more inclusive use of power was seen as a practical alternative, although the one manager who had adopted it did not feel supported by the other two women at her level who she felt had adopted the macho cultural norm.

The theme of feeling powerless was striking. A deputy leader, for example, stated she

sometimes felt she had no power, and was often unaware of what power she really had, since 'broad policies are set by the leader and labour group, and the rest seems to follow'. Part of the problem seemed to be a feeling of 'just following on', not carving out her own agenda. This view was not shared by a woman manager, who saw the deputy leader as effective, being successful as she had been, in establishing her authority in relation to male senior managers.

Feelings of success or failure get confused as women in decision making roles have difficulty in using their position power to effect change. This difficulty seems related to a range of factors, from which it would be inappropriate to generalise without further study. They are: discomfort with male ways of getting things done: "when Mike wants something done, he says 'do it'; I say 'is it possible to ...?" This councillor felt sure she was less effective, but felt that to adopt the same manner herself would be going 'against her nature'. She felt uncomfortable with what she experienced as a confrontational style; to give more direct instruction would risk refusal, confrontation, and having to back down. To complicate matters further, the woman senior manager perceives her as extremely effective in her communication. Are there then issues about self- image and self perception which continue to undermine women decision makers?

The deputy leader felt that the hardest thing about her relationship with male senior managers, was the fact that they have more contact with the (male) leader, Mike. The difficulty is not her style, but the contrast between her style and his, and that fact that his would evoke a positive response, and reflect poorly on her own. This was compounded by a difficulty in establishing clear boundaries between their areas of responsibility, since Mike tends to 'just do it' and respond immediately when something comes up.

This difficulty in recognising the possibility of a different model of wielding power was expressed by male managers, who confessed after their female senior manager had established her credibility, that they simply could not imagine a woman sitting on the dais at council meetings. As she pointed out, this had nothing to do with levels of skill or qualification. The role of presiding over a council meeting is an administrative one, requiring only the ability to look dignified, and to count votes.

Women in positions of formal power often seemed uncomfortable with using it; uncertain of how to use it. Senior managers, more than the other subjects, had developed their own strategies for subverting, or adapting, accepted ways of exercising position power. Officers were frustrated with elected members who fail to say: 'do it!', but instead back off, and then blame officers behind their backs. Elected

members often seemed unclear about the limits of their power. They were caught up in internal conflict, and this conflict closed off discussion and blocked constructive negotiation. Neither officers, managers nor elected members seemed able to contemplate being open with women within the community about what they could, or could not achieve. Each subject seemed to draw upon a history of mutual hostility and scapegoating, to justify their withdrawal from negotiation.

Within the refugee community, women in advocacy roles found themselves attributed with powers they had not got, by women and men who came to them for help. Women refugees experienced similar frustration with male ways of working, and resistance to their own collaborative approaches to problem solving.

At national level, informal networks of local authority women are depleted since many have lost their jobs through reorganisation and redundancy. These networks had been effective for advancing service provision for refugees. There is no specific work on women refugee issues at national government level. One interviewee who works in a national independent refugee organisation has succeeded in securing funding for a specific post, and co-ordinates a network to resource initiatives by and for women refugees. High proportions of refugees are women.....yet the refugee political world is predominantly male. Men have problems relating to a woman a colleague and the refugee working groups are predominantly male.

VALIDATION

Few elected members ror officers found they were able to meet their needs for validation from within the local authority. Several referred to their own internal values and belief systems when asked what sustained them. Some referred to family, friends and members of the local community. One referred to her memory of her mother, who was her source of inner strength.

KEY POINTS

SURVIVAL ISSUES

The majority of women interviewed were in a state of seige; working in difficult conditions, in which their work was undervalued and often under attack within their organisation, or within their community. Women in all three roles were members of communities or organisations whose survival was at stake.

BARRIERS

Within the local authority, a combination of factors had shattered creative work which had been under way on women's equality and community participation. These factors could be described as internal responses to external interventions. New legislation curtailed local authority powers and resources; while national party political interventions were in conflict with local priorities. The introduction of purchaser/ provider splits within the local authority increased insecurities and undermined co-operation between senior managers. Internally, political commitment to equality and community participation was dropped by the majority, and this was reflected in senior management hostility to community development and equalities initiatives. The result was fragmentation of old alliances between women in different roles who had been working to achieve common goals. Subjectively, women in different roles regard each other with distrust, and initiatives to support each other have proved fragile and difficult to sustain.

GOALS AND VALUES

Each of the interviewees described herself as committed to women's equality, and interpreted this as increasing access to decision making for women inside the organisation and for women active within their local communities. They contrasted themselves to women senior managers who they alleged had changed their values as a result of moving into positions of formal power, or to women elected members for whom political ambition took priority over their commitment to local communities.

BLACK WOMEN

Black women interviewees included an elected member, several officers including a senior equalities manager, and women refugees. All of them had strong links with women within their own communities and drew upon their life experience as a

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resource to inform their work. Black women with whom they worked in different roles found it hard to accept limits in their role as elected members to their powers of influence within the council and this meant they had to deal with particularly acute levels of disappointment from their constituents arising from frustrated expectations. White colleagues did not always support their priorities which arose from their knowledge of issues of importance to black women within minority communities.

Black women who had taken on decision making roles within organisations were often more isolated than white women and had fewer sources of validation. Sometimes they faced hostility within their own communities, from men and women who felt threatened by their departure from traditional women's roles.

STRATEGIES

Yet within this context, women interviewed were continuing to pursue their goals, trying to influence events and to work in ways which remain compatible with their values. Their strategies were concerned with circumventing line management structures and decision making procedures which they experienced as obstacles; informal networking to gather information; creating open forums and working groups in order to open up decision making to service users eg refugees and to make services more accessible to them; and adopting participatory management styles.

Elected members expressed their commitment to women they represented by insisting on a reduced commitment to work on equality issues for women employees, in order to focus more on improving services. Women employees were demoralised by the effect of reduced resources and autocratic management culture, and had lost much of their commitment to service delivery. Both members and officers felt powerless to change negative elements of the organisational culture and political priorities which were undermining their work. Senior managers who had adopted an open, participatory management style were effectively agents of positive cultural change.

POWER AND DIFFERENCE

There was common ground between interviewees in terms of approaches to decision making, commitment to open participatory styles. The degree to which they felt able to develop this approach in practice was determined by external contextual factors, as well as internal ambivalence. These contextual, external factors included rapidly reducing resources, and restrictive legislation.

Interviewees did share a discomfort with what they perceived as a style of work

which was expected of them in order to demonstrate competence in their role. Senior managers had experienced hostility from colleagues for being 'too soft'; their particular style had been interpreted as an inability to make decisions and accept accountability for them, rather than a positive desire to seek other opinions and to involve others in the decision making process. Members referred to a political culture which was hostile to genuine community participation, but anxious to retain a public image of commitment to it.

All of them referred to working in collaborative ways, to encouraging participation, needing to work across organisational boundaries, encouraging a team approach; all of them referred to having to survive within a competitive, aggressive culture which they identified as masculine. It was beyond the scope of the project to compare these statements with actual practice; the important point is that interviewees were expressing a common experience through which they made sense of their position as women within their various organisations.

This common experience suggests the women interviewed shared a different model of how to wield power in organisations which was at odds with the predominant culture. This led to confusion for some women in their thinking about how to use their position power to effect change, and difficulty in assessing their own effectiveness. This was compounded by lack of communication between women in different roles.

NETWORKING & ALLIANCES

Interviewees valued networking with each other, but
felt able to devote little time to it. Family commitments took precedence during their free time, and they felt managers would not allow them to meet in working hours.

Yet networking had been the basis of their past achievements in gaining access to decision making for women within local communities, and for building alliances with them to achieve change in how the council exercised its powers.

Within peer groups, women did expect and give each other personal support. Tactical practical alliances were limited to specific interventions, and were made on the basis of shared views or a common goal. Gender was not perceived as a determining factor.

With the exception of the deputy leader and the senior manager, there was a tendency to draw upon a common history of failed attempts to work constructively together,

which fuelled their sense of vulnerability to attack.

Communication between women was poor, resulting in lack of support and feeding hostility arising from perceptions of role and accountability.

The effect of all this fragmentation was loss of potential support for those who most need it, the women refugees. As one councillor put it 'staff don't get political guidance or senior officer support and them get jumped on by the community for not supporting them'. This is the dynamic which had undermined progress on the work of the refugee forum, and which blocked the research initiative to set up a meeting with women refugees to explore how officers and elected members could support their work with women within refugee communities.

COMPLEMENTARY INFORMATION

POLITICAL CONTEXT

Conservative government legislation has reduced the political powers of local authorities, and is changing their role from direct service provision to purchasing services on the basis of needs assessments. A new business culture is replacing the culture of welfarism, and has been introduced through a strategy of reduced funding from central government for local authority service, and legislative change in their statutory powers.

This has posed specific dilemmas for labour party run local authorities, such as this one, who have a strong public image of commitment to community consultation and equal opportunities work. Resources are stretched to the limit to meet the extra workload of administering the changes required by legislation. Internal reorganisation to meet new responsibilities has led to chaos and demoralisation among staff who find their values incompatible with the new culture and priorities.

Another factor has been the changing image of the Labour Party itself. In its attempt to dissociate itself from the image built up in the press, it has put pressure on local councillors to adopt a lower profile on equal opportunities work, and avoid confrontation with the government over implementation of new legislation. In this local authority, councillors did take a stand and refuse to implement directives to levy a new local tax. As a result of this, they were suspended by direct intervention by Labour Party central office. Most of these suspended councillors are women.

A major areas of stress within the local authority is the plight of refugees who are arriving in increasing numbers. At national level, the conservative government has proposed legislation, the Asylum Bill, to restrict the numbers of refugees. This effect has been to create confusion about the right of refugees for access to services, and in some cases to encourage employees within statutory agencies to withhold services from refugees.

Within this local authority refugees are arriving in desperate need of housing, basic services, and personal support. Often they are suffering bereavement and acute distress. Members of refugee communities include Somali, Eritrean, Vietnamese, Kurdish, in total thirty five different countries of origin and speak 30 different languages. Many of them have spent long periods in refugee camps, in their country

of origin, and may have spent another period held in detention centres in this country. Women refugees in particular are suffering from isolation, language barriers, and difficulty in taking up opportunities for education, training or language classes due to childcare responsibilities, and fear of harassment from neighbours. Their contact with the outside world tends to be mediated through men, who are frequently unable to adequately represent their needs to service providers.

The local authority has no extra funds from central government to provide services for refugees.

The refugee worker within the housing department is the only employee with a specific brief to work with refugees. A large part of her job is to provide support to refugee housing associations which operate independently of the council. The council does provide some funding for some community based refugee organisations and officers have taken their own initiative to improve access to services for refugees.

Officers and members of the local refugee communities have formed a Refugee Forum to facilitate communication with refugee groups and review service provision. Representatives of refugees are almost entirely male, and are not in touch with women's specific needs. The Forum has been meeting for two years and members are feeling disillusioned at the lack of practical results achieved. The groups discussion with women refugees organised as part of this research was the first meeting of women refugees from different refugee communities in the borough.

EQUALITY STRUCTURES

Equal opportunities work within the council has recently been restructured. Under the previous structure officers separate units were responsible for work on race equality, women's equality, equality for lesbians and gay men, and were politically accountable to separate council committees. These have been reorganised into a single equalities unit, reporting to an equalities committee.

In practice the new unit is understaffed and marginalised within council political and management structures.

HEALTH AUTHORITY WOMEN

THE INTERVIEWEES

We invited ten interviewees working in a London health authority to take part in the research on the basis of their interest in the questions which the research was designed to investigate. In other words, they are with the exception of one man, women likely to be committed to increasing access for women to decision making within the health authority, and in a position to do so as part of their brief as members of the organisation: working on service delivery issues in consultation with service users, addressing race issues, or equal opportunities within the health service. They are drawn from the three groups identified in the research proposal, ie employees of the health authority and its provider units, organisations representing women in the local community, and members of the provider unit trust boards. They were approached informally, and invited to take part on the basis of personal interest.

Valuable background material was also collected through interviews with individuals with an interest in the research, and with related experience. These were:

members of the Department of Health Equal Opportunities Unit, responsible for the Opportunities 2000 initiative
a member of a women's health strategy group working to influence the purchasing strategy within a different health authority
researchers at the Centre for Applied Psychology of Social Care, University of Kent

COMMON GOALS ?

All of the interviewees were committed to equal opportunities for women in some respect. and felt their job was to bring about change.

External influence was important in creating several of the posts held by interviewees. Lobbying was done by community based black and ethnic minority groups, with encouragement from individuals within the organisation, in a context of reorganisation which for the first time placed the needs of service users at the top of the agenda. What is the relationship with those groups now? We explore this in alliances below.

PERSONAL GOALS/ CONTRASTING REALITIES

The three non executive members felt they had a unique perspective to offer as women and as members of their own ethnic communities, with their own experience as service users. None of them had previous experience of working for health authorities. They expressed commitment to 'representing the views of black people as I know them to organisations providing services for them', and felt the health authority 'positively wan ed black women who saw their priority as progressing race issues'. All of them felt as one of them stated: 'I genuinely believe that the health authority for the first time (following reorganisation) has power to achieve change'.

They had taken on their roles with clear objectives, and felt there was a 'fit' between the brief they had been given by the organisation, and their personal goals. Some of their stated goals were:

- to keep the healtl needs of ethnic minorities on the agenda: 'having someone visibly present for an ethnic minority focuses the mind'
- to look at how you could make purchasing more effective; to take commercial concepts like purchasing, contract negotiation, and apply it to an area it had never been applied to before, 'real pioneering stuff'
- to take disciplines from business, eg efficiency, and see how it could be applied in the public sector
- looking at how we would be accountable to the public; eg needs assessment and how to go about this, eg with pockets of the population who are not vocal

Two of them described their primary focus and interest as race; they felt that the health authority had gone out positively to find a black person to nominate in order to be seen to be addressing the needs of the local population which is 50% black, and whose needs have not been adequately addressed previously. While they recognised that women have specific needs which need to be addressed, they felt their initial task was to set up an infrastructure for basic common needs of black and ethic minority service users to be met.

These priorities were shared by the health and race advisers, whose brief is to work through the contracting process to sensitise services to black and ethnic minority residents within the area served by the health authority.

Senior women managers within provider units do not experience such a direct 'fit' between the contracting process and the achievement of their goals. In one of these units an interviewee spoke of negotiating the tension between the developmental goals

expressed through the work of her unit, and the language of performance measurement by end product, which she needed to use to obtain resources. She had successfully made bids for resources to carry out developmental work, work with women in local Arab communities to identify their primary health care needs and access to services.

Others experienced a sharper tension between achieving equality goals within the new structures. These difficulties were compounded by the absence of an equivalent post, or of consistent senior management support, within the purchasing authority.

GENDER ISSUES

It was difficult to formulate questions which would lead into a discussion on gender issues which related to the work of the interviewees. As one of the interviewees said, 'since women make up most of the service users and most of the staff are women, there is no need to specify women's needs.' There seemed to be an implicit assumption that the needs of women are being addressed, do not need to be specified.

In the work of the health promotion unit, for example women are targeted within health education programmes: 'the issues relevant to women are no different in this respect than the issues of any other group'. But differences do arise from women's position within local communities. For example where male leaders block initiatives by women, or where women's projects are under resourced and cannot cope with the needs expressed by women within the communities they serve.

For the health and race managers, and the non executive trust members, gender figured as a service delivery issue on the one hand, and as an issue for them as black women within their day to day work. Within their programme of work to improve services for local black and ethnic minority communities, they felt the needs of women needed to be addressed specifically, and this they had already begun to do. For example, the majority of interpreters are female, in recognition of the fact that most health service users are women, who in many minority ethnic communities do prefer women health practitioners.

There was a tendency to limit definitions of women's health service needs to reproductive services: this is expressed in the title of the committee covering reproductive services 'Maternity Services and Women's Health Liaison Committee'. This committee did however provide a channel for the Community Health Council to

present a substantial report on women's 'experiences of health care[10]. The report was drawn up after widespread consultation and makes recommendations relating to specific difficulties experienced by black women with health practitioners as well as more specifying health needs of older women, and women with children.

Within the employment field gender issues are well documented and more immediate and easily defined. This does not mean they are less controversial, or better received: some initiatives have simply not been taken up by general managers. Examples of initiatives which have been taken up include recruitment targets and monitoring, job share and career breaks, dependency leave, sexual and racial harassment policies and procedures, access to nursing and general management jobs for women, and in particular black women. However managers were reluctant to take up proposals which involved consultation with their female staff.

More difficult to approach was the question of how the interviewees experienced working within the health authority, as black and white women. Did they experience clashes, conflicts, which they experienced as arising from gender difference? Aspects of this are explored under 'barriers' and 'power and difference' below.

POWER AND DIFFERENCE

'There is an informal feeling of women working together for women but this can't be formal, open, since there is no structure within the health service to allow or enable this'.

'There are some women senior managers who are committed to progressing women's equality, and some who aren't'.

It was beyond the scope of this research to investigate the reality of women's experience as service users, or the reality of day to day life for lower grade women staff. The focus of the research is on women in decision making positions. Two points help to put this in perspective however. The secretary of a community health organisation stressed the importance of casework support to empower individual women and to improve services for them. For example she had dealt with four cases of alleged sexual assault in one of the provider units in the previous few weeks. The health and race manager spoke of the distress she experiences at being approached

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[10]'Women Speak Out: a report on experiences of health care' Community Health Council, 1992

repeatedly by black women employees members who are suffering harassment, and at the non existence of effective procedures for them to get redress. Research on the experience of Arabic women using health services suggests that the culture within some provider units may sanction a fundamental lack of respect expressed as discriminatory treatment by white male and female health practitioners towards black service users.

Research[11] demonstrates that subjugation to harassment in organisations is not confined to lower grade staff, but is experienced by a high proportion of women at all levels from their male colleagues. It was beyond the scope of this research to investigate the extent of harassment suffered by women in Eldorado. The fact that some harassment exists indicates that there are elements in the culture of Eldorado which are in constitute powerful barriers to women who wish to gain access to power within the organisation.

BARRIERS

All the interviewees faced barriers which made it hard for them to carry out the job they were employed to do. This was to be expected, since all of them were appointed to bring about change within the organisation. Nevertheless, it often took time to identify the nature of the barriers in the course of discussion in the interview. One interviewee stated that she experienced being asked to focus on barriers as being asked to collude in an admission of failure, as a woman, or as a black woman, therefore to be resisted. Anxiety was expressed as to how a rank discussion of barriers faced might be interpreted, if not by me, as interviewer, than be readers of the report. This anxiety stemmed from a feeling of pressure to present their work as a series of success stories, in order to safeguard their position and reputation. One interviewee felt unable to allow her material to be used in the report, because she felt she might be identified, and that it presented a picture of her work which would inevitably be read as a description of her own inadequacy, rather than the difficulties endemic to carrying out her work within an organisational context and culture which she felt at odds.

Sometimes interviewees did not perceive difficulties they were experiencing as 'barriers', but experienced them as obstacles which they accepted they would have to negotiate in the course of their day to day work. This was the case with the non

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[11] see for example *'Sexual Harassment at Work, a resource manual'* by Michael Rubenstein, IRS 1989 revised 1992

executive trust members, two of whom insisted that they did not experience any barriers or resistance at all to the work they were trying to do. Several stated that it was too early to have encountered barriers, the new structures had only been in place eighteen months. One would have to return in a year's time to see whether plans and commitments had come to fruition.

Sometimes barriers were difficult to grasp and define; certainly they are not all straightforward, but may take the form of double messages received, or a subjective feeling of 'not fitting in', 'not being adequate to the task'.

It was difficult to separate barriers experienced as resistance to the goals of the interviewees, in terms of the changes they are trying to introduce within the organisation, and barriers they faced as black and white women, trying to influence decision makers, usually male and always white. It is not easy to isolate gender related factors in either of these areas, and certainly it would be simplistic to attempt to explain them in terms referring to gender alone, without reference to the wider context including reorganisation, the clash of cultures resulting from this, reactions to change. Further research would be needed to tease out gender related factors; my own reading draws upon research and current debates about women and leadership. Let me start with some examples of the kinds of barriers which I identified in discussion with interviewees. They illustrate the difficult circumstances in which interviewees are working and which they are negotiating in their day to day work.

- 'lack of understanding' by different agencies, sectors, departments, of roles, agendas and constraints we are working under
- health service staff not wanting to step outside their areas of responsibility, although the purchaser/provider split is helping with this since it poses the question 'what are peoples' service needs?'
- lack of consistent senior level commitment to tackling equal opportunities employment issues
- ambivalence and resistance from senior managers on the provider side about putting resources into tackling race issues, making practical changes
- marginalisation and downgrading of status of equal opportunities managers
- personalisation of the issues; reducing organisational issues to personal agendas
- loss of position power through reorganisation
- loss of key allies who have left the organisation
- unreliability of management support
- having to 'sell' the issues she is employed to work on in order to justify her post

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- management resistance to consulting employees in order to identify priority equal opportunities issues within employment
- a dependency culture manifested in a defensive 'top down' approach, whichresists consultation with employees
- entrenched conflict, resistance to dialogue
- lack of training on structures and role of non executive trust members
- inadequate information systems for non executive trust members
- limited time to network, tap into others' experience & expertise for non executive members
- lack of resources of community groups, making it difficult for them to take part in consultation exercises, or work in partnership with the health authority
- male community leaders blocking initiatives by women in the community

Sometimes interviewees described turning these factors to their own advantage. For example non executive trust members found the lack of structures and clear guidelines concerning their role left them free to make direct contact with employees and to get things done where they might otherwise have been wrapped up in time consuming bureaucratic procedures. All of them had developed effective strategies for getting around the barriers, and these are explored in the sections below.

ACHIEVEMENTS

The achievements of interviewees were many and various, ranging from setting up ethnic monitoring systems and health and race quality standards, to setting up joint projects and consultation with local community based organisations. All of their work breaks new ground within the organisation, and perhaps because it is so new and still in progress, it is difficult for interviewees to think of in evaluative terms. Much of their achievement must be the creative element which runs throughout their work; the reality of inventing, day to day, ways of interpreting the brief which they were given, of negotiating in-built contradictions and inevitable resistance to change which they encounter. This resistance always threatens to spill over into personal opposition, because the post holders as black women, as women, working in equal opportunities, are seen to personify the changes they have been appointed to initiate. I shall explore these themes further in sections below 'ways of working' and 'survival strategies'.

STRATEGIES

All the interviewees tried to work through building consensus within the organisation, resorting to top down methods where this failed, if they had the position power to do

so, or the necessary support from senior managers prepared to use it.

This is particularly so for the race and health managers, purchasing and provider side, where race and health managers are able to work through the new structures to consult with user groups draw up guidelines for purchaser contract specifications, engage providers in a dialogue to set realistic targets for meeting the contract. On the provider side, they have done groundwork to motivate managers, and focused on training, informing, and influencing in order to build consensus. Contract specifications and perfomance related pay are used as strategies to overcome blocking. One important factor is that senior managers on the purchasing side are committed to the changes involved.

For employment work there is no equivalent support on the purchaser side. The Department of Health Opportunities 2000 has required provider trusts and health authorities to draw up action plans for meeting targets set by the campaign by 1994. These have been drawn up by individual trusts in Eldorado, but without input from the purchasing authority there is no co-ordinated strategy.

The health and race manager (providers) faces similar difficulties on the provider side. While management totally support the objectives they were employed to work towards, they have resisted ownership of the issues. She has developed her own strategies for dealing with this. 'When I feel I am being blocked, I get together with the purchasing manger, and get them to put it into the contract. If providers don't comply, they may not ge. the money they are asking for. This hasn't yet been tested.' Their approach is to seek consensus, to motivate, inform and try to influence.

Several interviewees described the subjective effect of stresses they suffered on the job, and strategies for dealing with them. One of the interviewees finds she is often identified with the job she has been appointed to do, so that she is seen to personify the issues managers are being asked to address. Managers express this by saying to her that they see her as 'having a very big race agenda'. Her response is to tell them that this is true, but the issue is 'how is the organisation going to take this forward and use her skills in order to help them do their job'. She asks them to 'deal with the issue and not with me as a black person standing for race.'

Close work with black women outside the organisation is an essential part of her strategy. She works closely with black and minority ethnic men and women non executive members and members of local communities to set corporate objectives, and has set up health and race advisory forum within at least one of the provider units to is to take these forward.

Working with community organisations is central to the work of all the interviewees, several of whom are applying their previous experience of voluntary sector and local authority work. The health authority has no tradition of community development and is seeking new models by drawing on the experience of the private sector. These models are based on marketing, and the experience of interviewees suggests that while different in focus they do provide some openings for change.

While working in partnership with voluntary sector organisations may be in tune with government thinking, it does not sit easily within the prevailing culture of the health provider units, where health practitioners are accustomed to forming their own views about health needs of their patients.

The non executive members were appointed because of their links with local communities. Interviewees saw themselves as key respondents, and accept that their role does not allow them to be accountable to community organisations or to 'represent' them in this sense. They describe themselves as building up a picture of community need. However two of them who work for a local voluntary advice agency, rely on the information to which they have access internally to inform them of the health issues they need to take up. There does seem to be a danger that they substitute the lack of adequate resources to engage directly with women service users and to research their needs.

INGREDIENTS OF SUCCESS

It is clear that the introduction of the purchaser provider split has shaken up old entrenched power structures and introduced a contract culture within which the central question is 'how are we going to meet the needs of service users?' 'The focus is now on patients needs, not just what you are interested in.' This in turn has created an opening for the specific needs of black and ethnic minority communities, and other communities of interest, to be acknowledged, researched and addressed. 'Decisions to set up a new unit or specialism are now based on 'what are patients' needs? what is the market?'

On the other hand Health Service reorganisation does threaten to remove resources for health services for the groups who need it most. It is too early to say whether these fears will be justified in this particular health authority. Interviewees felt that difficult questions relating to reviewing criteria for spending on the basis of their work will emerge more clearly in the year ahead, when they have finished setting up the infrastructure of service standards and performance review.

There have been clear messages from the Department of Health about the importance of addressing black and minority communities health needs, and increasing the numbers of women in decision making positions.[12] In addition the Department of Health Patients' Charter Initiative sets standards, introduces patients' rights that these standards be met, and to have complaints investigated. This has been taken up by Eldorado Purchasing Manager, eg by requiring provider units to examine the feasibility of allowing women service users access to female staff and single sex accommodation.

However the mere fact that over 50% of the local population are minority ethnic has not in itself been sufficient to change perceptions. Representations made by local groups and projects, picked up be committed individuals within the health authority, have been crucial in getting the issues onto the agenda. Statements and instructions from the Department of Health continue to contribute towards create a climate of receptivity to these representations. Why then has there been no similar progress in addressing women's needs in Eldorado?

Perhaps after all it is because women have not organised as effectively as black and ethnic minority groups. Yet in other health authorities where women have formed effective lobbying groups little progress has been made. Opportunities 2000 is premised on the supposition that 'women's equality makes business sense', and that league tables and public image will be sufficient motivators to get male senior managers to remove barriers which prevent women from advancing. The response in Eldorado to date suggests that this may not be enough, and that as current research suggests a strong lead from senior decision makers on the purchaser as well as provider sides within the organisation is essential for progress to be made.

Interviewees identified some internal factors which they feel have helped them to achieve results:

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[12] 1. *NHS Opportunities 2000 goal 4*

2. *'Where Are All the Good Women?'barriers to the appointment of women to NHS authorities and trusts and ways to overcome them'*, 1992, Working Party on Women and the New NHS Managing Authorities, ISBN 0946832 83 8, makes specific recommendations to encourage women to come forward to serve on trust boards, approach women through local networks, etc

3. *'Equal Opportunities for women in the NHS'*, Office of Public Management, commissioned by the Personnel Directorate, NHS Management Directorate: recommends developing equal opportunities initiatives which involve working with local communities:

4. *' On the state of public health for the year 1991' HMSO* reported in The Guardian newspaper, 29/9/92

access to formal power

- position power for self and line manager
- strong management support
- being able to work as allies across the purchaser/ provider split
- using the contract process, and performance management systems, including performance related pay, to ensure agreed goals were met
- access to funding
- the relatively small size of the management team, whose members are all located in the same building, facilitating regular contact, good communication
- team commitment to my job, participation in drawing up the job description
- being a member of the purchasing team, setting the work programme for the whole Health Authority

ability to work with the voluntary sector

- a well organised voluntary sector, representing different communities of interest and ethnic groups
- managers who have worked in the voluntary sector, and are committed to developing mechanisms for engaging with the local community

motivation and organisational culture

- a desire for innovation, status attached to developing new practices
- desire to survival in a context where there are codes of practice, internal and external pressures to raise meet new standards of performance
- growing awareness emerging from the rhetoric about reforms, regarding the role of purchasers in having responsibility for the health of the population
- being free to take initiatives, no longer necessary to go via the regional health authority, or Department of Health
- general shift in attitudes throughout the health authority towards black and ethnic minority issues

personal empowerment

- being positively wanted and valued for my contribution as a black woman
- being an equal member of the trust board, able to contribute to discussion on everything (not just race)
- a match between my goals and the goals of the organisation, ie to improve health services for black and ethnic minorities
- having links with local black communities and a knowledge of their needs
- having support from the race and health manager, ie someone with a brief to

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address race issues within the organisation

- access to information, knowledge and experience through my professional job, which I can use to help me carry out my role as non executive trust member
- having direct access to health service employees
- decentralisation of decision making, resource allocation, creating a feeling of optimism 'everyone feels they are able to achieve, that they have power and authority to take decisions' (at senior management level). 'There is an extraordinary freedom to work, to raise any matters, coming from their commitment to be amenable, an openness and accessibility which is unprecedented'
- private sector experience, of purchasers and providers working together, on a basis of common interest

All the interviewees drew on resources from previous experience, in personal and employment history, to help them in their role. Private sector, voluntary sector, health authority, local government, as employees or trust members; significantly only one had a health authority employment background. They all drew on life experience of resisting oppression within their personal lives, and of taking part in organised struggle against it.

NETWORKING

Both networking and making alliances within and outside the organisation to bring about change were important to all interviewees, for survival and personal support, as well as to influence and bring about change.

Networking as a means to doing the job well and being effective was central to all the interviewees. They networked with others with whom they perceive a communality of experience, such as ex colleagues, or employees doing similar work in other organisations. Sharing common gender or race identity was important, but not the only factor:

'I network with minority ethnic contacts, and those I have developed from personal experience in certain areas of work; I tend to network with women because we have a common experience'.

ALLIANCES

We have already described in strategies above some of the alliances which interviewees have built. These focus on well defined common agendas which address gender issues only peripherally. Nevertheless they do illustrate a way of working which is often associated with women's preferred work style and in Eldorado women have adopted it in order to strengthen their position within the organisation. This has operated at a level of personal support and validation, which we discuss below, as well as at the strategic level, which we explored in the section on strategy above.

The alliances cross organisational boundaries, by establishing close working relationships with women within community based projects. Interviewees working for the health authority found different ways of bringing independent voices into face to face contact with decision makers inside the organisation, and creating an organisational framework for dialogue to be established. This subverted the tendency of the organisation to marginalise the issues by routing them all through the specialist advisors. Women non executive members of trust boards were in an employer relationship to the health authority employees interviewed, yet saw themselves as working in alliance with employees in order to progress issues to which they were committed. These issues included, but were not confined to, the needs of black and ethnic minority women.

The context for all this was central government intervention, through the Department of Health, which has put race and gender issues onto the agenda of senior managers and created a space for community based lobbying to bear fruit. The initial groundwork was done by community based groups and contributed to creation of the equal opportunities posts held by interviewees.

These alliances are however constructed on a specific ground: that of service user and purchaser, focusing on service provision. On the employment side it is too early to assess how far the decision makers will buy the slogan that 'equal opportunities makes business sense', and whether this can be a strong enough motor for change for women working for the health authority, who face barriers well documented by research commissioned by the Department of Health.[13]

Management support would not normally be described as an alliance. Yet where management commitment to the job women have been employed to do is lacking,

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[13] *Equal opportunities for women in the NHS,* ibid.

alliances with senior decision makers is crucial. Interviewees described vulnerability in situations where key allies left the organisation and were replaced by others who were not supportive of their work.

Across organisational boundaries, alliances to achieve change for race equality were strong, and black women were playing leading parts in drawing key players together using their roles within the new structures. Women within community organisations on the health provider units also had established alliances to work together to highlight women's needs within health service planning. While they were able to use their positions to facilitate this work there is no official structure which enables them to progress their work o · which gives it official recognition.

This absence of structure is at odds with the aims of the Opportunities 2000 Campaign, and devalues the work of women who are taking initiatives. It reduces the effectiveness of interventions which are being made and separates the work on race and gender, to the detriment of black and minority ethnic women.

SURVIVAL STRATEGIES

Making allies and using position power and mechanisms to hand within the organisation do not guarantee success. All of the interviewees reported frustrations and stress in having to negotiate resistance, and work within a culture with which at best they are not in tune, and at worst is positively undermining to their goals. As change agents in new roles they are each creating their own roles, and often having to find their own sources of validation which may not be forthcoming from the line management structure. Each of them have developed their own survival strategies. I asked them each 'where do you find the energy to keep going?' 'where do you get your validation from?' 'what do you feel good about?' Here are some of their replies:

COPING WITH ISOLATION
and lack of management support

'sometimes you have to survive without recognition or appreciation...just sticking with it until something has shifted'

'at first I thought it was all my fault, not being able to make allies..couldn't ask for help or advice..and was terrified to tell anyone anything couldn't afford to make any mistakes and was just feeling miserable: I didn't feel confident I had anything to offer...so I just left the organisation and worked with the organisational outside it, got

recognition and confidence...now I can see much more clearly what I'm good at...I feel much easier in myself and I don't apply that rigorous test of 'what have I achieved in terms of changing things for all these people, but 'what have I done and what do I feel I did well'

'I won't give in until I feel I have done something substantial, until I feel I could leave tomorrow and feel good about what I have achieved.

RESISTANCE

'I want them to address the issue of how they are going to deal with the race issue and not with me as a black person standing for race.' To enable her to do this she draws upon her life experience as a black woman who suffered discrimination from when she arrived in this country: 'I integrated into this society and still hold my beliefs, my culture very strongly. When I came to this organisation I challenged them and said 'isn't this your job?' and 'I don't want to do everything to do with race'. I suppose the challenge is always on that level, having to influence and facilitate them about how to bring about change.'

MOTIVATION

Non executive trust members were so enthusiastic about their role that it made no sense to ask them about survival strategies. Instead I asked them what they find so exciting about their role:

'learning about new projects'

'turning things around by focusing on the needs of the black community; making a contribution on how a hospital can serve the black community'

'its hard work which we do in our spare time, weekends and evenings, but we love it!'

ADVICE

what advice would you give to women considering taking on your role?

'having self confidence and not all the time looking for outside validation; knowing that what you say is relevant, you can't learn unless you make a mistake'

'women have a unique perspective, so go ahead and see what you will achieve, then you will develop your own agendas. do not be afraid to make mistakes, people will grow to respect you for your contribution, not if you pretend to have an expertise you don't have, you don't have to do the fitting in bit, go in there and be honest, say what you feel, have the confidence to do this.'

KEY POINTS

I went into the research looking for evidence of shared agendas on women's equality, and expecting to find them among women who I knew shared this commitment. I found instead a complex picture of inter-twined agendas, touching more or less directly on 'women's issues'. The personal qualities, survival strategies and ways of working of the women I spoke to had a common core: networking, working across organisational boundaries and departments, and ability to draw upon personal strengths and resources from all spheres of life experience, stamina and creativity were all clearly identifiable, as were the task related strengths traditionally associated with men.

Black interviewees, working on race issues, were the most optimistic. However they stressed that the situation in which they are working is a new one, still in flux and relatively fluid. In a year's time they may be feeling differently, perhaps hitting up against more entrenched barriers, as they begin to work on issues where there is less consensus and commitment to tackling. They put specific work on services and employment for women within that category.

Absence of shared agendas on women's equality did not express a lack of conviction among interviewees of the importance of ensuring women's specific needs are addressed, or a lack of commitment on their part to doing this work. It did reflect a lack of corporate direction lack of support for women who are trying to address, and highlights the fact that the Opportunities 2000 campaign cannot conjure up commitment where it is absent.

The case study has not attempted to assess the effectiveness of Eldorado's equal opportunities policies. National Health Service commissioned research has documented practical barriers women face within the health service, makes reference to a widespread ad hoc approach and failure to integrate equal opportunities policies into general management processes. This research documents some of the effects of this ad hoc approach in Eldorado. The NHS research also documents the fact that

'management cultures and practices are male'[14] There are signs that culture of the Eldorado presents serious problems for women who are unable or unprepared to 'fit in'.

Finally, a note on the research process itself. It was difficult to limit the length of interviews, since although interviewees saw me in their free time, on a voluntary basis, they valued highly the space to reflect on their experience and were interested in the possibility of networking at European level. This practical possibility, referred to in recommendations to the NHS management executive, is a project we intend to pursue.

The following points relate specifically to Eldorado and will be picked up in the general conclusions and recommendations of the report.

STRATEGIES

The work on race issues in Eldorado should be taken up as a model for work on gender issues, using the contracting structures to develop a corporate strategy to access decision making for black and white women at all levels of the organisation. This would provide the internal mechanisms needed to build on the Opportunities 2000 campaign goals within Eldorado and complement and strengthen the work on service delivery which is being carried out informally.

ROLE OF WOMEN WITHIN LOCAL COMMUNITIES

The initiative to create resources to tackle race issues came from committed groups outside the health authority, and was picked up by individuals within. However within the community women often do not have their own voice and this can lead to a splitting of race and gender issues, which can marginalise black women. Special resourcing is needed for black and ethnic minority women within local communities to enable them to work effectively with health providers to improve health services for women within their communities.

COMMUNITY CONSULTATION AS A VEHICLE OF CHANGE

Within the health authority, the health needs of women tended to be perceived as reproductive. This perception was shared by women health practitioners who we

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[14]*Equal opportunities for women in the NHS,* ibid, para 4.5.7

interviewed as well as men. Feedback through consultation with women in their capacity as service users demonstrates that their needs in relation to health services are much wider, and differ according culture, age, and many other factors. Ongoing consultation is the only way to ensure that these needs are adequately understood by health practitioners.

EFFECTIVE CONSULTATION

The health authority had no tradition of community consultation and scarce resources to develop the necessary contacts with community networks.

Community groups themselves have the expertise to carry out effective consultation, were able to advise the health authority how to reach women service users. This role needed to be validated and resourced.

BLACK WOMEN

Black women felt able to draw on their experience as service users to inform their work. They felt motivated to do so because they could see commitment from senior decision makers to put race issues on the agenda, and felt their contribution as black women was valued.

Black and white women did have different agendas, and priorities. Black women working on race issues felt that while their first priority was to set up an infrastructure to address the needs of all black and ethnic minority communities, they were aware of women's specific needs within these communities and committed to getting them met.

IMPACT OF MARKET MECHANISMS

The new market based structures within the health authority had shaken up old power structures and created a framework within which service users have to be consulted. However they leave less room for the development work which is needed for genuine consultation with women within local communities.

Government initiatives have set the framework for work on race and gender to assume a higher profile within health authorities. Community based initiatives from well organised community based projects have been crucial to ensure that these are taken up by the health authority in ways which benefit women and black and ethnic minorities in Eldorado.

BARRIERS

Women found that resistance to the work they were doing on race and gender was sometimes personalised, implying they had a chip on their shoulder. Barriers they encountered within the organisation related to organisational culture inconsistent with their goal of addressing race and gender issues, lack of consistent management support for their work, inadequate resources for women within community groups limited the scope for tapping into their expertise and working with them on joint projects. Non executive members found the lack of clearly defined mechanisms useful; it meant for example that while information systems were undeveloped they had direct access to staff at all levels and were able to approach them directly when they needed to.

ACHIEVEMENTS

Women's achievements were impressive: interviewees stressed that they wished to be represented within the research report as achievers within a difficult context, and not as victims. They were creative and entrepreneurial, inventing ways of interpreting their brief, making the most of existing structures and creating new ones to bring about greater access to decision makers to women outside the organisation, building consensus where possible, but using top down methods effectively where consensus failed, and where their position enabled them to do so.

ALLIANCES AND NETWORKING

Women on the whole found validation from outside the organisations they worked for. The personal stress of the work they are doing as change agents is high; support networks to sustain them are vital to make the work possible. Networking and alliance building is central to achievement, yet still unrecognised by managers as part of the job their staff were employed to do.

COMPLEMENTARY INFORMATION

HEALTH AUTHORITY FUNCTIONS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Eldorado Health Authority was formed in 1988 out of the merger of two smaller health authorities, and a further merger in 1990. The area it covers is typical of inner cities today and has both extremes of social, economic and environmental problems. It is responsible for providing health care for about 440.000 people.

Its functions have altered radically as a result of the government's health service reforms. The National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990 has led to a number of significant changes in local health services. The key changes are the separation of the District Health Authority's (DHA's) purchaser and provider function. DHA's are now purchasing authorities; they receive funds to purchase services on behalf of their resident population. Hospitals and other health service providers are now directly managed units or NHS Trusts. These providers will no longer automatically receive cash to fund the services they provide. They will have to earn it through having a contract with the Purchasing Authority to provide services to patients and users. In this health authority this means that what was the health authority has over the period of the last eighteen months become a purchasing authority and its provider units, now or about to be self managed trusts. The Health Authority retains a management function only for those directly managed provider units who have not yet arrived at trust status.

DECISION MAKING STRUCTURES AND MECHANISMS

Purchaser and provider units are run by Trust Boards, consisting of a Chief Executive and four other executive and five non executive members. Executive or 'professional' members are senior managers; non executive members are appointed by the Regional Health Authority and by the Secretary of State, and are likely to be drawn from the local area. The Chairs are local business people, and are appointed directly by the Secretary of State.

Research has shown that women are under represented on Trust Boards, although there have been recent improvements Reasons for under representation are well documented and recommendations to address barriers have been forwarded to regional health authorities Targets for increasing the proportion of women have been set within

the Opportunities 2000 programme.[15]

The purchasing units are responsible for assessing the health needs of the population they serve, and contracting with provider units to provide services they have prioritised. This process involves identifying actual and potential service user groups within the various communities served; devising effective consultation mechanisms; setting priorities and on this basis drawing up service specifications for provider, monitoring progress and applying sanctions if specifications are not met.

These processes are new, and the sanctions relatively untested. They offer new opportunities for intervention in order to implement change which require a different set of skills and new strategies. In the interviews participants explore their experience concerning the scope for advancing equality within this new framework.

THE LOCAL POPULATION

The population[16]is a rich mix of people from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds. The census indicated that about 51% of the local population are black and ethnic minority; this is one of the highest in the country. Almost all religions are practised by residents: those with the largest followings are Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Sikhism, and Judaism. Twenty five languages other than English are spoken, including African, Asian, Afro caribbean, Chinese and European.

Ethnicity is an important factor in shaping demands on the health services, largely due to the fact that these communities experience discrimination in most areas of their lives with large sections being acutely disadvantaged. some ethnic groups are susceptible to certain illnesses, and services need to be adapted to meet them.

Women within these minority ethnic groups also have specific needs. These have been researched and documented through a consultation exercise carried out by the

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[15] *Women in the NHS, an implementation guide to Opportunity 2000. Opportunities 2000* goal 4 is to 'increase the representation of women as members of authorities or trusts from 29% in 1991 to 35% by 1994'

[16]This section is taken from *'Public Accountability, Black and Ethnic Minority Communities'*, report of a first stage consultation exercise with voluntary agencies and community groups, 1992.

Community Health Council Women's Group.[17]

There is a well established voluntary sector in the area, including organisations based within minority ethnic communities, some of which are women's projects, disability organisations, and various umbrella organisations. The Community Health Council plays a role in representing community needs, and is frequently invited to speak on behalf of community interests. It is now one among many organisations since its statutory function was removed by the recent legislation, and is important from the point of view of this research because of its focus on women's health needs.

EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES

The NHS is the largest employer of women in Europe. However studies show that this has not been reflected at senior management levels or within the new trust boards. The Department of Health nationally is placing emphasis on the importance of increasing numbers of women at senior decision making levels, and has made statements concerning the need to address the needs of minority ethnic groups. Virginia Bottomley who is responsible for promoting the NHS Health for All 2000 initiative, has been promoted to Secretary of State within the new government. The NHS was the first government department to become a campaign member of Opportunities 2000.[18] This campaign is co-ordinated by a team within the Department of Health, who are responsible for co-ordination and monitoring progress in meeting the goals of the campaign. All health authorities and their provider units have been asked to draw up action plans demonstrating how they intend to meet these goals. While this must have some beneficial effect in getting the issues on management agendas, it cannot create commitment where it is lacking, as is the case in some of the trust units of this health authority. Within this health authority action plans have been drawn up and sent in, but without corporate direction or co-ordination..

Recent statements by the government recognise the fact that health services do not meet the needs of ethnic minorities, and that health professionals had not tried hard enough to meet these needs. The health secretary has announced that she will meet ethnic groups, health managers and professional bodies to assess needs and draw up

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[17]'Women Speak Out, a report on women's experiences of health care in Eldorado '1992 ibid

[18]'Women in the NHS, an action guide to the Opportunities 2000 Campaign' produced by the NHS Women's Unit, Department of Health, 1992

action plan. 'We are also looking at how to improve employment and promotion opportunities for black and ethnic minorities people within the NHS. I want to see more people from this section of the population as health authority or trust chairmen and in senior positions'.[19]

These government initiatives have had a significant impact on the health authority, not so much in terms of specific actions or changes which have been required, but in terms of placing the issues on the agenda within the health authority and its provider units, and providing those who are committed to taking them forward with a framework and ideological basis for action.

In Eldorado there are no corporate structures and only a few posts with responsibility for developing equal opportunities initiatives. These posts are: the equal opportunities advisor (employment); the race and health manager (purchasing); and the race and health manager (providers). The employment post is the only generic equal opportunities resource, and has very little back up within management structures. The restructuring has significantly changed the position of this post within the structures, with the result that while situated within the purchasing authority the post holder has to sell her services to the provider units. The result has been piecemeal initiatives and an absence of long term perspective. The race and health managers came in at the time of restructuring, and have briefs designed to work through the purchaser provider split. However they have no resources to call upon to help them develop their work on disability, gender or other equal opportunities issues.

All three post holders have developed strategies for achievement designed to use the formal and informal structures available to them as a result of the new regime. For example several of the provider units have set up advisory groups such as race and health groups, and 'focus' groups made up of service users.

The overall picture is one of fragmentation, and an absence of organisational focus on gender.

REORGANISATION ISSUES

The new regime has increased the decision making power of managers and reduced the power of professionals. Health professionals formerly operated as self employed freelancers, and were accustomed to making their own decisions concerning what

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[19] see footnote 11

patients needed. Now their relationship to patients is managed by the purchaser, who allocates resources and sets standards for quality of service. The purchaser has introduced a third player within this contracting relationship: the 'service user' who as actual or potential patient is invited to advise the purchaser on the quality and demand for the product. The use of 'focus groups' as a mechanism for consultation is a mechanism borrowed from market research, and signals the introduction of the language and culture of the market within a culture based on deference to professional expertise.

This shaking up of old power structures, within which there was no place for patient consultation, or space for challenging the power of professionals, has opened up possibilities for new voices to be heard. These are women, black people and minority ethnic communities whose specific needs had not formerly been acknowledged or addressed. They are being invited to speak in their capacity of consumers, service users, in a context where the health providers need to demonstrate that their product is able to meet specifications, and where the purchaser draws up specifications based on their analysis of the market, and monitors performance of the providers. Within this process there is considerable room for challenging old priorities and inserting new ones. For example at the point of drawing up specifications, and monitoring performance.

Within the interviews we explore how women are taking up these openings, and the effect of the language and culture of the market on their ability to make alliances for change.

CONCLUSIONS

WOMEN REDEFINE POLITICS

Women have their own distinct definition of politics, and a different approach to decision making.

The context for this study is one in which traditional concepts of democracy are in deep crisis. Political parties and public sector institutions are undergoing a process of redefinition. Women's approach could be the key at this critical moment to the process of redefinition which is needed to create something new from the discredited old democratic ideals on which the present reality is built.

In the case studies we can see how women have sought to insert their own agendas into the old structures, and are grasping new opportunities to shape the new structures which are emerging.

We describe practical initiatives women have taken to increase their access to decision making within public sector institutions and political parties.

LONG AND SHORT AGENDAS

·   The case studies provide contrasting settings within which we explore how women worked together across different roles to increase their access to decision making. From this material we identified a long and a short agenda[20] for change. By this we mean:

*   a focus on access to decision making for individual women, eg by increasing numbers of women in leadership positions (the short agenda), or:

*   a focus on transforming organisations by introducing new models of decision making, opening up access to decision making for women (the long agenda).

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[20]the distinction between the long agenda for transformative change in organisations and the shorter agenda for equal opportunities for individual women developed by Cynthia Cockburn in her book 'In the Way of Women: Men's Resistance to Women in Organisations' Macmillan, 1991.

WOMEN IN ITALY

The Italian women's campaign 'Women Change Time' focuses on the long agenda. They are most explicit about the need to change institutions to accommodate women's lives. They challenge power structures inside organisations and political parties and develop practical models of participation in decision making for women outside these organisations. They do not reject 'equal opportunities' as a concept but insist on measures which acknowledge and accommodate gender difference as well.

WOMEN IN THE UK

Women in the two UK case studies are less explicit about their long term agenda for women. Their focus tended to be on shorter term, more immediate goals. Longer agendas were implicit, and informed their approach to decision making within their work. Common concerns did strongly emerge from discussion.

LOCAL AUTHORITY WOMEN

Like the Italian women interviewed, these women were committed to opening up decision making to women, as actual or potential service users and to women within their community at work or at home. Their approach to problem solving promoted team work. They all found that their approach effectively challenged power relations within their organisations and often brought them into conflict with male decision makers. Like the Italian women, they all felt the personal cost of carrying out their work had been high.

The framework for former alliances between elected members, women within the local community and officers, had been shattered due to political change and financial stringency. Support networks were fragile, survival the primary issue. A new set of objectives around which to build alliances had not yet emerged.

This case study provided the first opportunity for refugee women and for women officers to come together, to identify issues which they might share in their approach to decision making within their work.

HEALTH AUTHORITY WOMEN

In contrast women who we interviewed within the Health Authority who were working on service related issues felt optimistic about their ability to improve services for women service users. The introduction of contractual relationships within the former health authority had siaken up old structures and created potential for new relationships to be forged between service users, health service providers and the health authority as a purchasing unit.

These women were working from specialist posts designed to improve services for black and minority ethnic communities. They were using marketing models to open up decision making and involve women within local communities. However despite the existence of a national campaign to improve women's position within the health service there was no equivalent structure to work on gender issues.

From these contrasting contexts, similar themes do emerge:.

MODEL OF POWER

A different model of power emerges from the experience of women working in all three settings: enabling, empowerment, power sharing, and consensus as opposed to controlling, top down leadership, and territorial concerns.

This model represents an ideal which women share, and operates as a powerful force for change. Its positive effects are expressed in alliances women in different roles have forged to create change in political and public sector institutions. Its negative effects are expressed in feelings of mistrust and betrayal between women who felt unable to negotiate differences of role and power within organisations.

APPROACH TO DECISION MAKING

Related to this model of power, a common approach to decision making emerges. This is based on a commitment to the use of decision making power to open up decision making structures.

Women have developed practical models of how to achieve this within political and management structures. But women in decision making positions described how this approach was consistently perceived as an inability to take decisions on their part.

They emphasised in contrast that as decision makers, they had their own practical approach to the decision making process, and chose to exercise their responsibility for making decisions by applying it.

INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL BARRIERS

There are internal and external barriers to women within decision making.

External barriers have been well documented and relate to access to decision making positions for women. Internal barriers have been less well researched.

Our material found that internal barriers exert a powerful influence on women's ability to negotiate change. External barriers could not be overcome by simply occupying positions of formal power within organisations and attempting to wield power in the ways expected of men.

Both men and women have powerful internal resistances to believing in women's ability to effectively carry out responsibilities attached to decision making positions.

These resistances relate to an internalised set of expectations of what it is to wield power. Both men and women experienced incompatibility between their concepts of competent decision making and power sharing. This created barriers in working relationships between women as well as in relationships between women and men.

Many women who have reached decision making positions have not felt able to challenge the masculinist culture of their organisations. They have adopted ways of wielding power which they felt were necessary in order to get things done, and have dissociated themselves from initiatives to address gender difference within their organisation.

ALLIANCES

In their practical work, women in all three case studies tried to create collaborative working relationships, forging alliances across differences of role and of position within their organisation.

This way of working was essential to enable women to carry out their responsibilities, yet they were not allowed time to network and build alliances. The new market based culture within the public sector with its focus on end product devalues development

work and in this respect makes it harder for women to function.

Alliances women did make with each other often seem fragile, difficult to sustain in the context of conflicting accountability and priorities relating to their place within the organisations they were seeking to change. They are often fragmented by feelings of distrust and of betrayal, where differences of role introduce conflicting priorities which then become difficult to negotiate.

Alliances worked best where objectives were specific, and broke down where expectations of support were not informed by a clear understanding of roles within the decision making process.

ALLIANCES AND NETWORKING

This report makes a distinction between alliances and networking. By 'alliances' we refer to agreements to work together towards defined ends, as distinct from networking, which might be for the purposes of support, information exchange, without necessary commitment to the same goals.

All the women we interviewed believed that for women decision makers to function effectively inside organisations they needed to forge close links with women they had power 'over' within the organisation and with women organised autonomously. These links were difficult to sustain where objectives proved insufficiently specific.

Sometimes alliances were confused with support networking; the need to build alliances on the basis of clear objectives and acknowledgement of difference was forgotten and instead an attempt was made to simply use support networks as a shortcut to alliance building. Confusion arose where formal accountability limited the scope for practical support between women who were able to support each other outside the context of their roles within the organisation.

PERCEPTIONS OF POWER AND ROLES

Yet roles within the decision making process were not so easy to define, and some women in positions of power had difficulty in holding onto a sense of how much power they actually had. This appeared to relate to their assertion of difference from male norms of behaviour. For some women refusal to adopt behaviour which was expected in order to project authority resulted in uncertainty that they were being taken seriously in their own right, a feeling that male colleagues were taken more

seriously. Other women felt that they had succeeded in building credibility and gaining respect from men on the basis of their own leadership style. Frequently women decision makers' perception of their own power did not match the perceptions of female colleagues, and this mismatch undermined potential support between women.

BLACK WOMEN

The position of black women in Italy and the UK are very different. In Italy there was no contact between women active in 'Women change Time' and black women either as groups or individuals. In contrast black women in England have effectively organised in order to gain access to political institutions and decision making within the public sector.

Black women in the UK who had taken on decision making roles within organisations had succeeded in building alliances with white and black women in order to place women's issues as well as race issues on the political agenda. They were more isolated than white women and had fewer sources of external validation.

WOMEN REFUGEES

Women refugees are isolated within their own communities and activists have not sufficient time or resources to network with women in the public sector. Resources are urgently needed and women who are committed to change and who are decision makers within the public sector and political organisations need to take the initiative to reach out to refugee women. Some have already taken the initiative to do so, and are in conflict with the predominant tendency of national governments to reduce access to services for refugees.

WOMEN IN LOCAL COMMUNITIES

Women within local communities are the initiators of change inside public sector institutions. They have expertise to work effectively in partnership with women inside institutions, on long and shorter agendas, but need resources to enable them to do this.

USING STRUCTURES

Market based structures are being introduced to the public sector with differential

effects for women. In the health authority they have dislodged old power structures and created a space for women to take practical initiatives on race and gender issues. In the local authority the effect has been destructive, accompanied by reduced resources and undermining of political commitment to equal opportunities and community development. In Italy the process has not yet reached a stage where its effects on women specifically can be assessed.

Black women working on race issues in the health authority are using the new structures to introduce practical change. This is a model which could be used to introduce change for women in organisations.

WOMEN AS CHANGE AGENTS

All the women we interviewed were effectively change agents, bearers of a new culture within their organisations, attempting to open up decision making to new subjects. Some were doing their work from positions of formal authority within their organisation, some were working from positions which carried little or no formal power. Some had formal backing for their work, others had none.

For all of these women the personal cost of carrying out their work was high.

Resistance to the changes they were attempting to work for was often expressed as personal hostility, as colleagues confused their identity as women with their role within the organisation, and tried to redefine as personal agendas the organisational issues they were raising.

This dynamic was experienced particularly keenly by black women we interviewed.

NEW APPROACHES TO DECISION MAKING

Women are bearers of new approaches to decision making within the public sector and political organisations; their impact is uneven, and varies from one organisation to another, and from one section within an organisation to another.

This uneven impact is not all due to the effectiveness of strategies which the women have adopted. External factors make evaluation of women's strategies more difficult and complex. They shape the context in which women are working and over which they have little control. For example government initiatives have created a context favourable to change within the health authority and are destructive of initiatives in

the local authority. In Italy the political parties are all in crisis and scandal has called into question the credibil ty of political institutions at local and national level.

VALIDATION

On the whole women did not find sources of validation for their work within their organisations. They relied upon friends, ex colleagues, peers in other organisations, family, allies in independent organisations, and members of their own communities.

Belief systems are important in sustaining women, by providing a framework for distinguishing one's own values from the priorities of the organisation, recognising limits to what it was possible to achieve as an individual, while maintaining a sense of self worth, based on remaining true to personal values and beliefs.

Emotional as well as physical survival was a real issue for most of the women we interviewed. The degree of scope for working in ways which were consistent with their values determined which interviewees were most enthusiastic, or demoralised.

ACHIEVEMENTS

Despite all these obstacles the achievements of the women we interviewed were many and various. They demonstrated tremendous creativity, continuing to invent new mechanisms to change the culture and structures of organisations in order to make them accessible to women and compatible with their preferred ways of working. They have succeeded in placing the issues on the political agenda, and making proposals for radical change beneficial for men and women.

These achievements now need to be recognised and welcomed as a contribution to resolving the crisis of political institutions and of local democracy.

STRATEGIES

Strategies varied with the degree of formal power available to women.

Women in the UK at senior level within the political and managerial structures were able to establish credibility on the basis of their own way of wielding power, although this took time and was not an easy process. They expressed this within their personal leadership style, and in their commitment to policies designed to open up decision making internally and to inviting members of local communities to participate.

Women with less formal power inside public sector organisations and political parties focused more on building up alliances outside their organisations, and tried to create mechanisms for direct contact between their allies and decision makers in order to bring about change.

WOMEN AT A CROSSROADS

Women who are succeeding as decision makers in their own right should be recognised as innovators, creating practical models for new approaches to decision making and representation.

Women are under pressure to limit the scope of feminism, to allow it to become detached from the hope of creating a more just and egalitarian society.[21] Campaigns on women and decision making must steer a path between the longer and the shorter agendas for change: equal representation of women and men in public bodies and political parties is a specific and just goal, for which we can build a broad based alliance. For feminists this is necessarily a step towards the longer goal of redefining democracy, righting the deficit of power for women at all levels within public life.

Feminists committed to securing greater access for women to decision making are now at a cross roads. We had previously aimed to increase the numbers of women in political institutions and decision making positions within the public sector. For some of us this was premised on the adoption of a further goal: to adopt and introduce different forms of decision making, as well as new priorities within them. We now find that these institutions we had planned to change are crumbling for other reasons. The question for women is, how can we obtain recognition of the models we have developed, so that they can be valued as a contribution towards the construction of more open, responsive organisations ? how can we support each other more effectively within our different roles ? how can we forge more solid alliances as decision makers inside organisations and within our local communities ?

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[21]Sheila Rowbotham, *'How quiet Can You Get?'* article in Everywoman magazine, July/August 1992

RECOMMENDATIONS

WE DIRECT OUT RECOMMENDATIONS TO:

1. decision makers in:
   * the European parliament and European Commission
   * national and local governments of members states
   * political parties

2. women within these institutions

3. consultancy, training and research agencies

RECOMMENDATIONS

I. TRANSFORMATIVE STRATEGIES

A. Women have developed practical models for decision making, based on their own model of power.

B. These models should be systematically documented by researchers and picked up by decision makers who are reshaping public sector organisations and political institutions.

II. THE LONG AND THE SHORT AGENDA

A. Strategies for piecemeal reform of organisations to facilitate women's access to organisations have had limited effect in increasing women's access to decision making.

B. Short term objectives need to be explicitly linked to longer term agendas for transformative change. These objectives must be grounded in recognition of gender difference, and of resistance to change by men and women identified with models of decision making based on established power structures.

III. EXTERNAL BARRIERS

A. This research makes a distinction between internal and external barriers to change.

B. External barriers have been well documented[22], and practical recommendations made for removing them. These continue to be adopted in a piecemeal fashion, and are marginalised by decision makers within organisations. The strategies recommended must be promoted within the mainstream of organisational policy. They relate to the need to:

* develop corporate equal opportunities and community consultation strategies within public sector organisations
* create organisational cultures which value diversity and within which women's qualities are valued
* create the conditions for equal partnership between the independent voluntary sector and the statutory public sector
* prioritise programmes of support for women refugees
* acknowledge the specific needs of black and ethnic minority women.

C. These recommendations have been made many times. This research confirms that they refer to essential conditions for women to function effectively as decision makers within organisations.

D. The focus of our research has been on working relationships between women who have been seeking to progress these strategies. The rest of our recommendations focus on the relationships between women and on strategies they have developed to progress this work. distinction between networking for supports, and alliances which are built around

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[22]see for example *Strategies for the Promotion of Women in Politics, survey of EC member states for European Women's Lobby*, Ailbhe Smythe, Director, WERRC, University College, Dublin, 1992. See also research references in footnotes to this report.

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specific objectives. Our material suggests that women do network together for support purposes, but find it hard to make alliances on the basis of more limited, specific objectives, and from positions of clearly defined roles.

IV. INTERNAL BARRIERS

A. Men and women have powerful internal resistances to adopting alternative models of decision making. These relate to internalised set of expectations to what it is to wield power effectively.

B. Action research and training programmes need to enable women and men to overcome these resistances. Decision makers in organisations need to design strategies drawn from this material.

V. ALLIANCES AND NETWORKING

A. Women need allies and support networks in order to function effectively in organisations.

B. Decision makers must encourage and value this as a way of working towards change and surviving within an alien culture.

VI. BLACK WOMEN

A. The specific skills resources which black women bring to organisations as well as their specific needs and concerns must be recognised by decision makers and women committed to opening up decision making within organisations.

B. Strategies must build in independent representation for black women and encourage them to develop an independent voice.

VII. REFUGEE WOMEN

A. The specific needs of women within refugee communities must be addressed by decision makers and by women organising independently.

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VIII. WOMEN IN INDEPENDENT ORGANISATIONS

A. Decision makers must recognise the vital contribution women organised independently of political parties and public sector organisations have played in putting these issues on the agenda. The role of autonomous organisation continues to be crucial in sustaining the momentum for change and women and men in organisations must create the conditions necessary for joint work to continue.

IX. EVALUATION OF ACHIEVEMENTS

A. This research, and the women and decision making programme of action would not exist were it not for the efforts of women committed to change. Achievements need to be celebrated, sung more frequently and more loudly.

B. These achievements are rarely evaluated, and material which enables us to assess strategies is therefore limited. Resources need to be allocated for systematic evaluation of achievements.

X. EFFECTIVE USE OF RESOURCES

A. Researchers and training consultants need access to each others' work in order to make most effective use of resources and to build on new practice models for change.

B. 'Women and Decision Making' is a new EC campaign and needs to find mechanisms for women to work together across different contexts. A variety of mechanisms are needed for exchanging and building upon the work which women are doing in different countries to create a resource pool from which new initiatives can be created.

C. We need new ways of sharing information, such as bursaries to enable women to develop joint programmes for research and training, and to come together to evaluate results.

D. We need to ensure that this work is fed through the mechanisms which already exist into current debates about the

future shape of the public sector, and of local democracy.

XI. RESEARCH AND TRAINING

We recommend:

A.   further research on practical models of how women have overcome resistances within organisations and succeeded in establishing open models of decision making

B.   further work with women to enable them to identify their internal barriers to taking on roles with power in organisations

C.   training programmes linked to the above research on 'decision making skills for women in organisations'. This would aim to identify skills which women already have in order to use them within their new roles inside organisations

D.   training programmes for women on 'women working with women in organisations'