WOMEN WRITING THEIR OWN STORIES IN DEVELOPMENT: BIOGRAPHICAL EXAMPLES FROM SOUTH-EASTERN ANATOLIA REGION, TURKEY

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ABSTRACT

One of the most important projects in the World, the Southeast Anatolian Project (GAP), is being implemented in the Southeast Anatolian Region of Turkey in order to reduce the development differences between regions and to increase the income levels and life-prosperity quality of the people in the region.

GAP is a multi-sector oriented integrated project being carried out in 9 provinces (Adıyaman, Batman, Diyarbakır, Gaziantep, Kilis, Mardin, Siirt, Şanlıurfa, Şırnak) in the Southeast Anatolian Region of Turkey. This region constitutes about 10% of the country as far as population and surface area. In order for this project to remain sustainable at the end of its implementation period, development of human resources, obtaining equity and justice in development and mounting participatory-democratic culture and public structure are being attached tremendous importance.

In GAP provinces there has been rapid and intense immigration from rural to provincial areas in the last 15-20 years. Immigration has increased the existing unemployment rate, employment problems and effects of poverty even more in provincial areas. The crisis of 2001 has deepened troubles even further like all around Turkey. Immigrants who have come to provinces from rural areas usually work for very little wage/salary and without social security coverage in marginal areas in informal sector jobs/seasonal positions. Research has showed that the ones who are affected mostly by the provincial poverty are mostly women and kids. Women’s and children’s participation into the economic life and thereafter improved social and economical status reflects directly on household prosperity. Approaching the problem due to this tendency, the special target group in development under GAP has been identified as young women, women and children, therefore, aiming to increase their positions through a totalitarian and integrated approach, Multipurpose Community Centers (ÇATOM’s) have been established. ÇATOM’s are established in neighborhoods and cities where there are many poor households due to immigration and in central rural settlements targeting public-based participation. The goal in ÇATOM’s is: getting especially young women and women to realize their problems, get to know them and creating opportunities for them to use their initiatives in solving problems, getting women to benefit more from public services, increasing women employment and entrepreneurship, strengthening women to increase equity and therefore develop repeatable participatory public development based model/models suitable for local conditions. As of year 2004, in 9 provinces in the GAP region, 30 ÇATOM’s were established and working accordingly to serve these goals.
1. INTRODUCTION

As in many other parts of the world, in Turkey too there are different approaches to the planning and implementation of activities relating to women. The South-eastern Anatolia Project (GAP) Regional Development Administration under the Prime Ministry, after examining the negative and positive outcomes of different approaches, adopted a gender-balanced development approach in activities and initiatives geared to the social and economic empowerment of women. It can be recalled that this is an approach which takes into account many factors deriving from given gender based division of labour as well as from established power relations and also measures the impacts of established economic and social relations. The GAP adopted the “sustainable human development approach” in 1995. This implies that instead of “economic development at any cost”, the new approach suggests a path which does not harm the environment and natural resources, observes and gradually improves existing social balances, reduces poverty, makes people as true agents of development and strives to attain economic development and growth objectives by focusing on improvements in the life quality of individuals.

The South-eastern Anatolia Project (GAP) has already succeeded in inducing significant economic development in the region through infrastructure investments and opening large tracts of land to irrigation. Still, an important task is to translate this material growth to social welfare by realising improvements in social structure. In this context, the essence of the GAP approach to social development consists of crating a democratic and participatory social life in the region, distributing the benefits of development to different sections of society in a fair and equitable way and, on the basis of this, ensuring the development of human resources. This approach to the design and implementation of the project has become more and more dominant and special attention is being paid to the disadvantaged sections of society (i.e. women, small farmers and landless peasants, urban poor, people with disabilities, vulnerable children and adolescents, etc.) The basic objective here is to remove those barriers denying disadvantaged people access to resources, provide equal opportunities and to create an environment conducive to sustainable human development.

The Multi-purpose Community Centres Project (ÇATOM in short) was launched in 1995 as an initiative particularly focusing on women. Objectives of the project include: raising the educational status and health standards of women; building or enhancing skills among women for income generation and employment purposes; building public awareness and sensitivity relating to gender-related social and economic problems; improving the status of women in society and their participation to public life and mainstreaming gender issues to the process of development.

After giving some preliminary information about the GAP and ÇATOM initiative, the present paper will provide some quantitative information on the status of women and young girls who have benefited from the ÇATOM scheme and made success in many areas including being more aware of the roots of their problems, taking initiative for their solution, making more and better use of available public services and starting their own business. Further, the paper cites some success stories and discusses the experience built so far. In fact, what we are going to talk about are
women and young girls who, under quite difficult surroundings, could manage to write their own stories of success.

2. MATERIALS AND METHOD

The paper addresses changes introduced by the ÇATOM scheme to the social, economic and cultural life of women in an integrated way also supported by specific observations. The core of the study consists of face-to-face interviews conducted with women and young girls participating to various ÇATOM activities and getting something out of this participation. Firstly, some descriptive information is given about each ÇATOM activity and then this specific activity is evaluated in the context of women who have taken part and benefited from this activity. These are “stories” from different phases of ÇATOM activities, which can also be taken as “biographical samples.”

3. SOUTH-EASTERN ANATOLIA PROJECT AND MULTI-PURPOSE COMMUNITY CENTRES

The GAP is one of the largest and most comprehensive regional development projects of our present day world. The project was originally envisaged as an infrastructure and irrigation initiative. Then, in 1989, it assumed the character of a multi-sector and integrated development project and then, in 1995, it was transformed into a “sustainable human development project.” The GAP is also described as a “project for social change” considering the socioeconomic features of the region concerned as well as the integrated nature of the project. In other words, the project bears the potential of bringing out radical qualitative changes in the given social structure of the region.

The GAP Region comprises about 10% of both the geographical area and population of Turkey. In 2000, the share of rural population in Turkey was 35.1% and the share of rural population in the GAP region was slightly higher than this with 37.3% (State Planning Organisation (SPO), 2003). The basic objectives of the GAP is to raise income levels and improve the life quality of people living in the region, reduce development disparities with respect to other regions, raise productivity in rural sector, generate employment and to contribute to national development goals including social stability and economic growth. The GAP is a human-centred development project and therefore it is based on the philosophy of sustainable human development.

As a human-centred and integrated project, the GAP considered the heading “role and function of women in development” as an important parameter first in 1991. At the initial phase, a series of baseline surveys were carried out in the region to depict the profile of local women including their ways of thinking, tendencies, potentials, social relation patters and problems. Then a model was developed to make women agents of development in the region. The model was the Multi-purpose Community Centre (ÇATOM). The ÇATOM is one of the social development programmes developed to improve individual, social and economic skills of women and to build the basis of gender balanced development in the region. The programme envisages the establishment of community based centres in urban poor neighbourhoods and centrally located rural settlements. The idea is to improve the present status of women and young girls and ensure their participation to social and
economic life either directly at these centres or through their outreach activities while giving special attention to local needs and priorities. As such, ÇATOMs were first launched in 1995 and at present there are 30 ÇATOMs in the region. From the late 1995 to June 2005, about 100,000 persons either directly took part in ÇATOM activities or benefited in some way from these activities. (www.gap.gov.tr/social projects/ÇATOM experience).

ÇATOMs aim at:
- presenting opportunities to women to become aware of their problems and take initiative for their solution,
- ensuring that women take part more actively in public life and benefit more from public services,
- enhancing female employment and supporting the self-employment of women, and
- contributing to equal opportunities by empowering women.

ÇATOMs are established as a response to local needs and requests. At early phases, field surveys are conducted and findings from these surveys are taken as basis of decisions. During any field survey, interviews are conducted with all relevant parties (local people, headmen, teachers, governmental organisations, etc.). Following the opening of ÇATOMs home visits are made to introduce the ÇATOM to families and to learn about their basic problems, needs and expectations. Programmes are then developed in the light of this information. Family visits are also functional in building organic relations between the ÇATOM and local community and facilitating its adoption by local people. ÇATOMs spatial proximity to targeted communities, frequent family visits and contacts on the basis of frankness all help make families receptive to the idea.

ÇATOMs adopt an integrated and flexible approach and encourage its attendants to participate in all programmes. The target group of these programmes are females above age 14. However, as a result of developments taking place in the course of programme implementation, children too are covered now. For example, pre-school education programmes have been launched in this context and such programmes as health training, computer skills and literacy courses have started to cover males though partly. There are also cases where social support programmes and cultural-social activities try to reach all family members regardless of sex and age.

4. MAJOR PROGRAMMES IMPLEMENTED THROUGH MULTI-PURPOSE COMMUNITY CENTRES

The ÇATOMs target to reach the poorest and most vulnerable sections of society. They are therefore established in urban poor neighbourhoods where rural migrants settle and at rural settlements having a centrally located position with respect to other villages. The ÇATOM programmes are carried out under the 8 main headings given below:

1. **Education-Training Programmes**: Literacy courses, information on civil code and legal rights of citizens, training in home economics and nutrition, training in maternity related issues, computer skills. Student support schemes, etc.
2. **Health Programmes**: Training programmes in hygiene, sanitation, maternal and child health and general health; policlinic and mobile health services; health screening in rural areas and urban poor neighbourhoods, immunisation campaigns and other services.

3. **Income and Employment Generating Programmes**: Related activities are as follows:
   i) Training programmes designed to build skills and information in income generating areas and occupations (handicrafts, knitting, cutting-sewing, stone working, silverware, cloth dyeing, textiles, souvenirs, hair dressing, pastry, etc.);
   ii) Business training to support female entrepreneurs; mediation in the provision of micro-financing/loans, individual counselling;
   iii) Activities for promoting marketing and sales; sales at exhibitions, fairs or through web addresses.

4. **Pre-school education programmes**: Education programmes targeting the age group 4-6.

5. **Children’s Reading Rooms**: Education programmes targeting children in age groups 4-6 and 7-14.

6. **Social Support Programmes**: Issuance of identity cards or green cards, civil marriage, directing particularly girls to basic education or open education, granting scholarships especially to girls from poor families, in cash or in kind assistance to needy families, providing aides and other devices to the disabled.

7. **Programmes for Social Responsibility**: Campaigns to support education, environmental protection and reforestation, voluntary support to works of public benefit.

8. **Cultural-Social Activities**: Seminars, exhibitions, interactive meetings, cinema and theatre, celebration of special days, organisation of leisure time-recreational activities such as tours and picnics.

5. **FEMALE STORIES BASED ON MULTI-PURPOSE COMMUNITY CENTRES**

This section gives more detailed information on major ÇATOM programmes which have the deepest impact on attending women and examples of personal stories of women in ÇATOMs.

5.1. **Women and Education**
The rate of school enrolment in the GAP region remains much lower than national average. The rate of female enrolment is further lower compared to males. As far as schooling after primary education is concerned, female enrolment remains behind male enrolment in both the GAP region and in Turkey as a whole.

Taking rate of literacy as one of the basic indicators in education, we observe that it is 73.2 % in the region whereas the country average is 87.3 %. In the gap region, the rate of female literacy is 60.1 %. The rate for the country is 80.6 % (SPO, 2003). Among factors leading to low female literacy rates in the region we see too early marriages, indifference to the education of girls, traditional values, regarding girls only as their mothers’ helpers a home, withdrawal of girls from school after age 10-11 and gender discrimination in general. There are also some other factors such as the mountainous topography of the region and existence of small, dispersed and remote rural settlements which hinder access to education facilities. Children living
in such settlements are either bussed to central villages where there are schools or they fall out of the net of education.

Low levels of educational status on the part of females put a barrier to their full participation to public life and create some problems in access to available services. Females’ low level of education also has its negative impacts on efforts to improve the health standards of people in general.

It should be mentioned, however, that recently there are some significant improvements in the schooling of girls. These positive developments come out as a result of closer ties with urban centres, mentality change on the part of families, mass media, transition to school bussing and increase in the number of regional boarding schools (YİBOs).

Education programmes implemented in settlement where ÇATOMs exist include pre-school education for the age group (4-6), early childhood development programmes, support programmes to improve the school performance of children (age group 7-14), scholarships to encourage the school retention of bright girls from poor families, directing girls above age 14 to open education channels, and literacy, civil law, nutrition, legal rights and maternity training for women.

**Personal struggle of a woman for literacy in the context of literacy courses given by the ÇATOM:**

*Her name is Ayşeyete. 20 years old Ayşeyete and her family takes part in the activities of Seyitler ÇATOM established in one of the poor neighbourhoods of Batman. She firstly completed literacy course and then participated in cutting-sewing courses. Her 2 sisters took part in “oltu stone working” courses as an income generating activity. The mother has her unique story about her acquaintance with the ÇATOM. She says: “One day I was in a hospital where they gave me a slip having a referral number on. I couldn’t read the number and find the room. I couldn’t ask anybody for I was so much ashamed. I tore up the slip in pieces and went back home crying. That day I decided to learn how to read and write at any cost.” Next day the mother was at ÇATOM with her 2 daughters. She spoke to the high-school graduate in charge of running ÇATOM activities in the area. She was anxious at the beginning “would they laugh at me if I come here and take courses?” The fieldworker strongly supported her idea and encouraged her to do so. The mother asked her to be placed next to a quick-learning girl in the class to grasp lessons better and faster. So started the literacy experience of a 53 years old mother. She attended literacy courses for 2 hours each day. When she went back home at the end of her first day in ÇATOM she spoke rather high to her husband: “You see I’ve learned to write few words and you’ll soon see me reading as well. Soon I will be reading street names and signs and I won’t have to rely on you in these matters. She was literate after 3 months. She is literate enough to read and express herself in writing. 3 (53 years old Ayşe is living in Batman).*

With ÇATOMs, hundreds of young girls and elderly women like the mother mentioned above step into personal freedom and public sphere. They all want to live in a society where females are full and active agents of social life.
Here is the story of another woman in relation to education:

Saadet has eight children and her husband is engaged in border trade. She chose to take literacy courses in ÇATOM. Her husband didn’t let her go at first saying ‘what is the point in learning to read and write at this age?’ But after taking permission from her parents in law she took courses when her husband was out of town for his business. She mostly took her smaller children along to ÇATOM in order not to put too much burden on her parents in law. She became literate after 6 months. She says her greatest ambition is to get a drivers licence to take her children to school with her car (37 years old Saadet is living in Şırnak.).

5.2. Health Services and Women
The rate of annual population growth is 1.8 % for the country it is 2.5 % in the region. This rate is too high considering the fact that there is significant migration out from the region. This means the fertility rate is quite high in the region. In fact, while the average fertility rate is 2.53 in Turkey it rises to 4.86 in the region (SPO, 2003). This high rate of population growth puts pressure on education and health services and makes it more difficult to reduce poverty.

Level of income and socio-cultural factors may be influential in determining access to health services. Insufficient Access to health services is a common phenomenon observed in low income and low education groups. Material difficulties may well delay or even prevent men and women alike to seek health services and medical care. There is the problem of affording prescriptions given by physicians even when health facilities are visited and services are sought.

The most important problem of women in the field of health is the unavailability of specialised physicians in many of their health problems. So patients may even have to travel to other provinces to find the right medical for their problems. ÇATOM activities in the field of health include training programmes in hygiene, environmental cleanliness, maternal and child health and health in general; policlinic and mobile health services; health screening and immunisation campaigns.

Story of a woman interviewed in relation to health services:

While 15, Gül gets married with a young man in her neighbourhood with whom she fell in love. In the early years of her marriage she didn’t want to have children for being too young yet and used birth control methods she learned from her elder sister. Later, upon the insistence of her husband she decided to have a child and stopped using contraceptives. But for two years they couldn’t have child. Then they visited a private physician and state hospital in Gaziantep. Tests showed that the problem was not with Gül but her husband. For 7 years they shared this information only with their parents. Then her husband went out for compulsory military service. Since her husband was a member of a rather large and influential tribe, se figured out that her in-laws would press for a male child in particular. So she suspected that her husband, although the problem is with him, might bring in a second bride. It would be rather disturbing for the tribe to learn one of their members
was infertile. Gül decided to take part in ÇATOM activities to learn new things and make friends. She took courses in handicrafts and health training. After 2 years her husband completed his military service. Meanwhile, Gül establishes intimate relations with the health trainer at the ÇATOM and together they convince the husband to go and seek medical help for his problem. This worked and now they have a child (22 years old Gül is living in Şırnak).

5.3 Women in Social Responsibility Work
Under the impact of the GAP, gradual changes are taking place in the social make up of the region including those changes in the behaviour, communication patterns, tendencies and material and moral values of individuals. ÇATOMs develop and implement programmes specially designed to create sensitivity and build up the notion of social responsibility. It is within the framework of these programmes that ÇATOM attendants participate in educational support campaigns, environmental interventions and reforestation, health screening, immunisation and other activities on the basis of voluntary contribution. The overall objective is to change the traditional position of women as “passive receivers” and transfer them to a new status in which they act as committed and socially responsible citizens contributing to the well being of their communities.

Neslihan in charge of Yakubiye ÇATOM in Şanlıurfa has her words to tell us in relation to the social responsibility programme:

“Our uncles, grandparents were very happy when we visited them at the Municipal Boarding House during the ‘Week of the Elderly’. Small presents and refreshments and our presence there made them feel that they were not ‘forgotten’. We had a nice day there. It was only 2 days after our visit that the Director of the Boarding House informed us that a group of elderly people would like to visit us at the ÇATOM. We were quite flattered when we heard from the Director that elderly people were preparing for this visit from very early in the morning and they had their best dresses on. We had lunch together at the ÇATOM and they were very happy to be with us. That was an unforgettable day for us.

Here is another woman telling her story:

Saadet is living in Batman. While she was 18, her father forced her to marry someone but she resisted. This event places Saadet and her father at rather conflicting positions. Saadet’s family then moved to central Batman from their village because of economic difficulties. Saadet confronted a kind of cultural dilemma after settling in the city. Her father insisted that she should behave just as she did back in their village and didn’t let her go out of home. Saadet felt herself quite frustrated. One day, looking out the window, she saw some girls, her neighbours, leaving their homes with bags in their hands. She is quite curious to learn where her neighbours were going out regularly. So she visited one of her neighbours and where they were going every morning. She found out that these girls were working and wished she could be one of them. Noticing her distress, girls informed the ÇATOM leader who visited
Saadet after few days. The ÇATOM leader kept visiting Saadet at home occasionally and eventually convinced her parents to let Saadet attend the ÇATOM and take courses there. Saadet first attends literacy courses and takes part in social activities. Then she finds a job in a garments workshop and starts working to support her family. Saadet is still working and her plan is to start her own business 22 years old Saadet is living in Batman.

5.4 Female Entrepreneurship and Employment

In the region of South-eastern Anatolia there is rather intensive migration from rural areas to urban centres and population congestion is making itself felt more and more as a significant problem. Also, most of these new urban settlers lack social and economic means to adapt smoothly to their new urban life and resulting unemployment and poverty strikes all including women in the first place. The particular situation of women derives from the fact that while they were active in their native rural settlements taking up many works related to farming, they become almost completely divorced from production in their new settlements, which leads to their social as well as economic marginalisation. This naturally depresses their social status.

Urban women with very recent rural background cannot take part in economic activities due to various reasons including lack of education-training and unfavourable circumstances in labour markets. Nevertheless, there are women and young girls in urban poor neighbourhoods of urban centres who are temporarily engaged in such works as hand weaving, textiles, garments, etc. Women come to the fore in such hand skills based works especially in the provinces of Gaziantep, Mardin and Kilis. In sum, women in the region have to struggle against almost all types of odds including unequal opportunities and unfavourable social and economic surroundings on which they have very limited control. In urban poor neighbourhoods there are young and unqualified young girls, majority of whom are employed in the services sector without any social protection.

Still, in some urban poor neighbourhoods where ÇATOMs are active (for example Batman ÇATOM, Kilis ÇATOM and Şanlıurfa-Yakubiye ÇATOM) there are women and young girls who can find relatively better jobs with the mediation of ÇATOMs. These jobs include childcare; work in textile, garments and knitting workshops; jobs in regional boarding schools; hair dressing; some office works and cleaning. Besides paid work, some women and young girls can get some income by working at home. Furthermore, training in how to start and run an enterprise selects women who have some potential for entrepreneurship and these women may start their own small businesses upon micro financing/loan support. Especially within the last 5-6 years, ÇATOMs can provide jobs to about 200 young girls and women a year and 9-10 women start their own small-scale businesses.

Nuran is the source of one of the most interesting stories of female entrepreneurship:

Nuran is secondary school graduate. Her family moved in from Hakkari province 23 years ago. The family has 6 children and the father is doing contracting jobs on temporary basis. She learns about the ÇATOM from one of her friends and takes handicrafts courses there. She says, “Now I...
Nuran is an active participant and in fact one of the board members. She frequently shows up at the shopping centre of the town buying materials necessary for her cutting-sewing. After having been seen by her cousins and accused of “going out and talking to strangers”, her family tries to keep her away from the ÇATOM. Nuran says, “I didn’t give up. I bought myself a sewing machine and now I can do it at home. I can process models from patterns and keep visiting the ÇATOM keeping it secret from others except my mother.” Nuran’s firm belief is that she can find relief from these pressures only if she had an occupation. She says that she was elected to the ÇATOM board, imposing her some responsibilities that she can’t just give up. **Nuran is now able to put and sell her products at exhibitions** (22 years old Nuran is living in Batman).

Below is the story of another woman starting her own business and generating employment:

Hacire is a married woman who has to put up with violence by her mother in law. One day she visits the ÇATOM upon the insistence of her sister. She is quite outspoken there, telling the staff in charge that she could no more suffer this violence and asks for help. Hacire is illiterate and she is first convinced to take literacy courses and skill building in cutting-sewing. The ÇATOM also introduces finds her a lawyer from whom she could take advice about her legal rights. As she learns more and more, she becomes able to express her feelings much better and decides to struggle at home. She first learns how to read and write. Then she finishes the second grade in literacy and attends open education courses. Meanwhile she also takes courses in health training and Works as health volunteer. Finishing her cutting-sewing course as well she starts a tailor shop with one of her friends with the support of the ÇATOM. **This small business gives her economic freedom. She gets a divorce and starts a new, active and committed life** (Hacire is living in Batman).

5.5. Women’s Access to Loans
Credit mechanism are now regarded as one of the major factors of production having its determining influence in starting business and promotion of entrepreneurial spirit. Access to credit in the GAP region, however, is more limited compared to other regions of the country. There have been some macro-level arrangements and loan programmes to encourage entrepreneurship by women and improve their access to credit facilities. However, the “Housewife Loans Scheme” introduced to encourage women has been received with indifference on the part of its prospective clients. **Main reasons why women in the region stay ff from credit schemes** include the understanding that “economic matters are exclusively for men”, women’s engagement in social and cultural issues, unawareness of relevant procedures, worries related to repayment, lack of any entrepreneurial background and lack of self-confidence. In fact, many women prefer to be indirect beneficiaries rather than direct users of loans.
In 2001-2002, the field staff of ÇATOM were given “Start your Business” (SYB) training in cooperation with the International Labour Organisation (ILO). The lady in charge of Batman ÇATOM was quick in conveying her newly acquired information to others and she arranged a training programme for women who were thinking about starting a business. Following this initial training course, three participants started, with the help of the ÇATOM manager, feasibility studies regarding their prospective businesses. Nefia, a 40 years old trainee who had learned how to read and write in ÇATOM decided to establish a sewing and home based textile business. The second participant, Harbiye, is 34 years old and primary school graduate. Finally, 23 years old Şükran is also a primary school graduate. These 3 women then started their businesses upon a loan of 3.8 billion TL. The Governorate of Batman supported their initiative by providing free dying materials, irons and ironing boards as well as furniture necessary for their workplaces. Once facing serious problems in their families because of the absence of any employment opportunity, these women are now making their living by responding to orders or their clients. They have also become models for other young women around. Now there are some other women in Mardin, Diyarbakır, Şırnak, Batman and Şanlıurfa following the same path and starting their small-scale enterprises by borrowing initial capital from their friends and relatives.

5.6. Women and their Organisation in the GAP Region
It is quite difficult to speak about any homogenous social composition in the South-eastern Anatolia Region. Traditional social and cultural structures still persist and have their influence. As natural consequences of hundreds of years old informal organisation patterns, tribalism as well as institutions such as ağalık and şeyhlik still shapes daily life and social relations although their influence is gradually reducing. Transition to irrigated farming, closer ties established with urban centres, rising rates of urbanisation and gradual modernisation suggest that archaic relations or patterns are losing ground. It is even possible to say that as a result of closer contact by different social groups and their joint presence in certain environments, “I” has started to take the place of “we”, pointing out to the prominence of individual as an initiative taking agent.

In some province centres in the region (particularly in Diyarbakır, Mardin, Gaziantep and Batman), once can observe some women in urban poor neighbourhoods coming to the fore as “community leaders.” Although few, there are cases where local women get together around these leaders to seek solution to some problems related to their neighbourhoods. With the exception of such few cases of “spontaneous leadership”, women mostly do not appear in matters that entail some kind of formal organisation or institution. Such organisations are mostly under the monopoly of males.

In ÇATOMs there are governing bodies whose female members are elected by others attending the ÇATOM concerned. These bodies consist of 5 to 7 members and one of them is the ÇATOM trainer appointed by the staff in charge of the ÇATOM as well as participating women. Members of the Governing Body, acting on the principle of voluntary participation, visit families, promote neighbourhood relations, identify the
needs and priorities of families visited and have their words while programmes are developed.

A woman, member of the Governing Body of Ömerli ÇATOM in Mardin says:

“As members of the board, our most significant experience this year was our better grasping of the importance of sharing information and ensuring the participation of our partners to all activities. It helped us understand better the importance of reporting, monitoring, evaluation and sharing all these with our friends. It helped a lot to plan better for our future activities.”

7. CONCLUSION

Constituting half of the whole human family, women have their specific problems which can no more be addressed only at regional or national level. In other words, most of these problems are universal in their nature. Problems, needs, expectations and potentials of women require multi-faceted and integrated approaches. And this, in turn, requires looking at issues and problems with a “woman’s eye.”

In the GAP region, traditional values still persisting conflict with the changing socio-economic structure and therefore slow down the pace of change. Traditional roles expected from women as well as established patterns of relationship tend to exclude women, forming half of the society, from production, education-training and public sphere. Such an exclusion or marginalisation inevitably lowers the socio-economic and human development performance of the region.

Nevertheless, thanks to efforts waged for decades, women in the region want to attain a status where they can stand on their own feet. In fact, they are present everywhere: in vineyards, crop fields, markets, urban workplaces and urban poor sweatshops. We can see one of them in outskirts of Şanlıurfa making overcoats by knitting together fur pieces; another one in Gaziantep, trying to make a living by cracking pistachio before marketing; others in Mardin concentrated in their lacework with needles in their hands and patterns in front; a saleswoman in Midyat appearing in the market with a large basket full of grapes and the old lady Gülbahar in Halfeti visiting the ÇATOM with her title deed to find out whether the rising waters of Birecik Dam will flood any part of her land. These are small examples, but still pointing out to the growing place of women in the process of development and change in South-eastern Anatolia.

Various programmes are implemented in ÇATOMs for women. Young girls and women find opportunities of making money by working either at these centres or at their homes. They can find jobs in such areas as childcare, garments, knitting, office works, hairdressing and employment in regional boarding schools. There are some who are distinguished with their entrepreneurial skills and given micro credit support to start their business. Now ÇATOMs are centres where women are truly empowered in social and economic terms. Each ÇATOM represents a space specially allocated to women to help them learn how to get organised and how to make a living. ÇATOMs try to reach the poorest at the bottom of the social pyramid. They function as instruments through which the poor, otherwise excluded from many services, can
find out about and benefit from these services. Frequent visits paid to ÇATOMs by local, national and international governmental and non-governmental organisations and expanding media coverage have contributed significantly to building awareness and sensitivity on gender issues. As a matter of fact, today discussions on the problems of women living in rural areas and urban poor neighbourhoods draw much more attention than they have ever done before. To sum up, ÇATOMs have done much in establishing that education and training of women is a must in terms of human rights and also a decisive factor in strengthening economic and social development.

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