

3 | Gender and development: theoretical perspectives

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Women in development

Women first came into focus in development as objects of welfare concerns (Moser 1993). Programmes of birth control, nutrition projects for women and children and for pregnant and lactating mothers were the focus of aid programmes. Patriarchal and liberal discourses, at both nationalist and international level, left unchallenged the question of gender relations in society, and often made these attendant upon a sexual division of labour and individual negotiation within the family. The welfarist approach remained dominant in the first phase of development practices.

Challenging the growth agenda

The predominance of the liberal paradigm was continually challenged by both internal liberal critics and by the alternative development model of state socialism. After the optimism of the 1960s, the oil crisis of the 1970s and 1980s focused attention on the issue of consumption of non-renewable natural resources, and the UN World Food Conference emphasized the need to address the question of food production rather than emphasizing the production of tradable cash crops to address the fact that violence, hunger and poverty were showing no sign of abating in the Third World. The shift in thinking about development came from three different quarters. The first was from within the liberal framework. The ILO initiated the work on development which sought to shift the focus of development from growth to fulfilment of basic human needs. In the 1980s Amartya Sen built on Basic Needs theory in his work on poverty and the concept of human entitlements and capabilities (1987) and during the 1980s there also emerged the discourse of sustainable development. The 'women in development' (WID) approach was first articulated during the 1970s and became a starting point for feminist engagements with development as discourse and as practice. The second challenge was from Marxism – alternative models of state socialist development, especially in China but also in Cuba, as well as neo-Marxist theorists who focused on the role of the post-colonial state in development and localized class struggles (Amin 1976; Sen 1982). Marxist feminists critiqued and contributed to these debates

(Mies et al. 1988). Third, there emerged in the 1980s a sustained questioning by post-structuralist critics of the development paradigm as a narrative of progress and as an achievable enterprise.

The liberal critiques: access and enablement In 1962 the UN General Assembly asked the Commission on Women's Status to prepare a report on the role of women in development. Boserup's pathbreaking study on *Women's Role in Economic Development* was published in 1970. Boserup powerfully combined an argument for equality with one for efficiency. She argued that women are marginalized in the economy because they gain less than men in their roles as wage workers, farmers and traders and that mechanization of agriculture, generally equated with economic development, has resulted in the separation of women's labour from waged agricultural labour, which in turn undermines their social status, while shifting agriculture and irrigated agriculture regimes showed high levels of women's participation in production as well as their social status. Building on Boserup's work other feminists analysed how women continued to be adversely affected by development and cultural practices such as mechanization of agriculture (Whyte and Whyte 1982). Rogers (1982) emphasized the importance of women to the development process itself; it was not only women who would benefit from expansion of opportunity, but the development process itself would better achieve its targets. This was an appeal to efficiency as much as to a better deal for women. Together, this liberal feminist analysis became the basis upon which the women in development (WID) agenda was crafted. The project was to ensure that the benefits of modernization accrued to women as well as men in the Third World.

However, WID's focus on access overlooked the importance of social and political structures within which women were located and acted. As Beneria and Sen have argued, Boserup presumed that 'modernization is both beneficial and inevitable in the specific form it has taken in most Third World countries ... [She] tends to ignore processes of capital accumulation set in motion during the colonial period, and ... does not systematically analyse the different effects of capital accumulation on women of different classes' (1997: 45). What Boserup and other WID scholars offered in terms of policy insights were prescriptions regarding improving women's standards of education and skills so that they might compete more effectively with men in the labour market; the privileging of the male productive norm – which women, in this analysis, need to participate in – led to a 'truncated understanding of their lives' (Kabeer 1994: 30). By 1980 feminist scholars and activists were criticizing this access-based framework by focusing on gender relations rather than women's status and challenging the eliding of gender issues with the practice of development agencies (Pearson and Jackson 1998: 2). Despite all its problems, however, the WID theorists' work made an important correlation between work and

status, which had thus far been ignored by the development agencies and governments in the West.

Meeting needs, developing capabilities, sustaining development The Basic Needs (BN) approach, which was first articulated in the 1970s, was an important contribution to the debates on development and influenced Sen and Nussbaum's capability approach, which was more gender sensitive than BN. BN queried the focus on growth and income as indicators of development. Methodologically, it put forward the idea that poverty is not an 'end' which can be eradicated by the 'means' of a higher income (Kabeer 1994: 138–40) and challenged the view that the liberal 'trickle down' approach to development resulted in a reduction of poverty and unemployment. At the World Employment Conference of 1976, the ILO proposed that '*development planning should include, as an explicit goal, the satisfaction of an absolute level of basic needs*' (1977: 31, emphasis in the original).

It was argued by BN theorists that basic needs are both physical – minimum levels of calorie consumption, for example – as well as intangible, what Sen was to call 'agency achievements' – of participation, empowerment and community life (1987). Thus development economics, in emphasizing longevity and neglecting the quality of life, was flawed and redistributing resources and addressing issues of inequalities – state provisioning of health and education and access to public infrastructure – were integral to delivering on development. Finally, BN proposed a participatory approach to development (ILO 1977: 32), which was expanded to include basic human rights 'which are not only ends in themselves but also contribute to the attainment of other goals' (ibid.). However, while BN allowed for a context-bound analysis of labour issues, it remained embedded in a gender ideology that did not unpack the relations of power obtaining within families. Women's work, too, remained on the margins of ILO analysis.

BN theory found reflection in debates on human capabilities and the Human Development Index of the UNDP through the work of Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum. Sen's work moved beyond an understanding of basic human needs and capabilities to a discussion of the required entitlements for the development of these capabilities. Following the work of feminist scholars such as Hannah Papanek, Sen challenges a 'culture'-based acceptance of women's entitlements. For Sen the basic parameters of entitlements are 'endowment' (what is initially possessed) and 'exchange entitlements mapping' (which reflects the possible exchanges through production and trade). In terms of endowment, Sen argues that, for the vast majority of people, it is their labour which is most important, and therefore the conditions of labour should be central to any analysis of entitlements. Nussbaum and Sen include legal, political and human rights that govern the domain of freedom needed to maximize labour-based entitlements (Nussbaum 1999). Sen argues

that while these freedoms are instrumental to (means of) development, they are also an end of development, and therefore constitutive of it (Sen 1999).

An analysis of the importance of development as freedom to make decisions led capability theorists to challenge the assumptions of the model of altruistic family distribution of resources (Becker 1981). Drèze and Sen argued that the family was not, as Becker had delineated, an altruistic space of harmonious distribution of resources, but a deeply contested space where women suffered owing to the patriarchal social relations obtaining within the home and in the public sphere (Drèze and Sen 1990: 56–61; Sen 1999: 189–203). This analysis of the household followed the feminist critiques of the family and the analysis of the way women negotiate spaces within it through making ‘patriarchal bargains’ (see Kandiyoti 1988). Unlike BN, the capability theory espoused by Sen and Nussbaum has given prominent attention to gender relations within the household through the examination of intra-household transfers and the critique of the altruistic nature of the family.

Intergenerational justice and sustainable development debates emerged in the 1980s; ecofeminist scholars, among others, challenged both the policies of modernization and the paradigm of modernism. They pushed further the sustainable development argument to incorporate the relations between social and biological life on the one hand, and the relations of power that structure these on the other. Ecofeminism reasserts the ‘age-old association’ between women and nature (Merchant 1980; Mies and Shiva 1993: 16). Ecofeminists have made direct links between colonialism and the degradation of the environment and of women’s lives themselves (Shiva 1989). Ecofeminism’s anti-modernism provides a radical edge to its critique of growth. The alternative model of development that ecofeminists espouse is anti-patriarchal, decentralized, interdependent and sustainable (Braidotti et al. 1994). The critics of these attacks upon modernism, however, point to the essentialism at the heart of ecofeminist articulations about women and nature and challenge ‘the dismantling of scientific rationality into social and cultural discourses ...’ which deprives the poor and the marginalized of strategies to reclaim the fruits of scientific advances (Nanda 1999).

The BN, human capability and ecofeminist theories all have an interest in sustainable development, a term that entered the development discourse with the publication of the 1987 report of the World Commission on Economic Development, *Our Common Future*. It defined sustainable development as: ‘development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs’ (p. 43) and identified two key concepts, ‘needs’, and limits to growth for sustaining environment’s ability to meet future needs. In doing so it clearly built upon the BN discourse, but by focusing on the needs of future generations it also supported the ecological concerns of the long-term sustainability of our environment.

The attractions of these critiques of modernization are manifold. First, they are challenges from within the liberal paradigm. Second, they speak in the language of feasible politics – NGOs can lobby, the economists and philosophers can persuade, the social movements can pressure and challenge dominant discourses – which makes change possible. Third, perhaps the most attractive feature of these approaches is that they bring together the concerns and viewpoints of various social movements and positions on development, creating a counter-hegemonic consensus in development.

However, the critique of this liberal challenge to the mainstream development model was also trenchant. First, it was pointed out that in all these theoretical interventions, while group-differentiated needs meant a disaggregation of requirements of development processes and outcomes, the disaggregated groups themselves remained relatively closed categories as intersections of class and identities were overlooked. Second, the focus of the liberal critiques, while interrogating the growth agendas, has been limited in its challenge to offering ‘public action’ for the provision of ‘public goods’ as an alternative to the growing globalizing of market-led development.

From WID to gender and development

By the 1980s, the feminist critique of WID had led to a shift in the discursive focus from the inclusion of women in development towards the transformation of gender relations as the major concern. While some saw, and continue to see, this shift as depoliticizing and de-centring the claims of women, the gender and development (GAD) theorists have argued that a focus on the relationships that position women within society must be at the heart of political activity (see Young 1997: 51–4). A focus on the gender division of labour within the home and in waged work, access to and control over resources and benefits, material and social position of women and men in different contexts all form part of the GAD perspective on development (Parpart et al. 2000: 141). GAD theorists also distinguished between practical, more immediate and strategic or long-term and transformative needs of women in their specific social and political contexts (Molyneux 1985; Moser 1993). This concern with interests was also being reflected in the later debates about empowerment (Moser 1989; Rowlands 1997; Parpart et al. 2002).

However, the GAD framework has not been able to influence development planning: ‘Gender planning, with its fundamental goal of emancipation is by definition a more “confrontational” approach [than WID]’ (Moser 1993: 4). I would argue, however, that while this challenge of ‘gender and development’ remains *potentially* a powerful one, in practical policy terms it too has been depoliticized. Institutionalization of gender, as integration of women before it, poses critical practical and political questions for feminist activists and theorists (Baden and Goetz 1997: 10).

Deconstruction and representation: the politics of post-development Building on the WID/GAD debates, but extending them in different directions, there emerged in the 1980s and 1990s the postmodernist feminist critique of state-based strategies of development leading to a disillusionment with ‘the project of development’ itself. Postmodern critics of development argued that ‘Development has been the primary mechanism through which the Third World has been imagined and imagined itself, thus marginalizing or precluding other ways of seeing and doing’ (Escobar 1995: 212). Development, they argued, shares this framing characteristic with Orientalism (Said 1978). The modern/traditional binary was rejected, as were articulations of planned development. ‘Science’ became one of many legitimate modes of understanding our worlds. ‘The local’ as a political and conceptual space then became important – not to be reconfigured by the nation-state but to be the site of multiple, life-improving initiatives (Escobar 1995).

As Marchand and Parpart comment, it is unsurprising that the feminist focus on difference and attraction to postmodernism coincided with the critique of middle-class, white Western feminism by women who did not recognize themselves and their experiences in these early articulations of feminism (1995: 7). The displacement of Feminism by various feminisms was a starting point for self-examination for many feminists, creating a space within which their subject positions came under scrutiny. The intellectual complicity of modernizing elites was brought into focus by post-development feminists, as was the hierarchical relationship between donors and recipients of aid, the NGO worker and the ‘clients’ of the Third World.

Several questions have been raised about this postmodern critique and the post-development framework. First, there is the question of agency: if all power is diffuse and all hierarchies redundant, how are we to approach the question of political activism? The question of organization – political, social and economic – also becomes unanswerable as the question of achievable goals is brought into question. Harstock (1990) points to the postmodern view of power as one in which ‘Resistance rather than transformation dominates ... thinking and consequently limits ... politics’ (ibid.: 167) and Lehman suggests that the constant deconstruction of discourse leaves difficult questions of power relations and immediate questions of crises management unanswered and unanswerable (1997). Postmodern perspective is also criticized for leading to relativism and political nihilism (Moghissi 1999: 50–51). Post-colonial feminists have pointed out that the postmodernist critique ‘Would indeed dismiss the current strategies and visions of African women whose struggles for gender-sensitive democratization hinge upon universalist feminist ideals’ (Nzomo 1995: 141).

The structuralist challenge to liberal development The structuralist opposition to the modernization model of development, while entirely gender-blind, was

a powerful critique. Dependency theorists argued that the liberal development model was in fact the 'development of underdevelopment' (Frank 1969) and disassociated (and even counterpoised) capitalism and development. What was less clear was what this critique offered in terms of feasible politics, and incremental development. Upon this view, 'delinking' from the global capitalist system was the only strategy that Third World countries could pursue, which was not an option for most countries. Further, the focus on the world capitalist system took away the focus on local struggles of the working peoples of Third World countries. There was also no attempt to distinguish between the marginalized within societies on the basis of ascriptive, gendered or non-economic indicators. In response to some of these criticisms, Wallerstein (1979) developed the 'world-system' theory. While the first two categories corresponded to the dependency theorists' characterizations of core and periphery, the third – semi-periphery – was a group of 'emerging markets'. Wallerstein emphasized the role of politics, ideology and the state in the working of this three-tiered world-system. Taking their cue from Marx's analysis of the 'Asiatic Mode of Production', some neo-Marxist theorists, writing in the 1970s and early 1980s, argued that state elites played an important economic role in post-colonial societies as a monopolizer of political infrastructures of violence and coercion, as well as an economic actor (O'Leary 1989).

A strong intervention was made in the structuralist debate by Marxist and socialist feminists. Mies et al. argued that primitive accumulation remained essential to capitalist growth, and that both international and national capital and state systems exploited the Third World as well as women in its pursuit of profit. They identified several commonalities between 'women and the colonies' (1988: 4): '... they are treated as if they were means of production or "natural resources" such as water, air, and land ... the relationship between them is one of *appropriation*' (ibid.: 4-5). They argued that capitalist exploitation of wage labour was based upon the male monopoly of violence in a modified form; that patriarchal violence at home and in the public space was intrinsic to the lives of women and to their exploitation. They suggested that the state institutionalized the 'housewifisation' of women's labour within marriage and through work legislation (ibid.). As an alternative, Mies argued for a society based on '... autonomy for women over their lives and bodies, and rejection of any state or male control over their reproductive capacity; and finally men's participation in subsistence and nurturing work ...' (Kabeer 1994: 66). Again, while this was a powerful critique of existing social relations, and its focus on the gendered nature of capitalist accumulation provided a critical development of structural analysis, its utopian radicalism remained both politically essentializing of women and men, and its rejection of any engagement with the state made it difficult to translate this critique into policy agendas of development.

Taking on this challenge of 'transforming practice' has been an increas-

ingly influential group of feminists who have drawn inspiration from Marxist critiques of capitalist development, but have been largely eclectic in their theoretical approach. They have argued against the ‘male bias in the development process’ (Elson 1995) and for initiating an engagement with institutions on the ‘inside’ of the policy processes – at both national and global levels (Elson 1998). Two areas have been at the core of this critique of development – the non-recognition of women’s work, and the gendered nature of structural adjustment policies of the 1980s and 1990s (Waring 1988; Elson 1995). They have built upon Sen’s critique of the altruistic family, to show how women’s contributions to the household income are being appropriated without acknowledgement. They have also incorporated Sen’s work on capability and developed sophisticated analyses of provisioning of human needs (Cagatay et al. 1995). In disaggregating the impact of structural adjustment policies on the household and focusing on the disproportionate burden of the privatization of social welfare that women are being forced to carry, this powerful critique has resulted in some important shifts within the economic discourse of international institutions. They have also further developed the interventions of Third World feminist and development groups, such as DAWN, which have advocated a strategic engagement with the policy community, and with state and international economic institutions in order to challenge the assumptions of neutral goals of development (Sen and Grown 1985). Because they have engaged actively with the policy machineries, especially at the international level, their influence in the field of development studies, and their interventions in the debates on development, have been significant.

Conclusion

Interrogating the theoretical debates on gender and development in the context of world politics allows us to reflect upon the complex and often contradictory nature of these debates, and therefore the impact that these have on policy and institutional issues, directly as well as indirectly: the Human Development Index adopted by the UNDP now measures the ‘quality of life’ rather than simple economic growth rates; many national statistical agencies now produce gender-disaggregated data; and the Human Development and the World Development Reports show the impact of WID/GAD theorizing and research. The various world conferences on women, from Mexico to Beijing, organized by the UN allowed gender and development agendas to be articulated, reassessed, critiqued and pushed forward. Bi- and multilateral aid and assistance programmes have also been affected by these wider debates on development (Staudt 2002). And yet, gendered inequality continues to be high and gender justice remains an aspiration. The struggle for gender justice and equality thus continues; the debates discussed in this chapter reflect as well as shape these struggles.

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