

From WID to GAD: Conceptual Shifts in the Women and Development Discourse

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Preface

The Fourth World Conference on Women, to be held in Beijing in September 1995, provides an opportunity for the world community to focus attention on areas of critical concern for women worldwide — concerns that stem from social problems embracing both men and women, and that require solutions affecting both genders. One of the main objectives of the Conference is to adopt a platform for action, concentrating on some of the key areas identified as obstacles to the advancement of women. UNRISD's work in preparation for the Fourth World Conference on Women focuses on two of the themes highlighted by the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women:

- inequality in women's access to and participation in the definition of economic structures and policies and the productive process itself; and
- insufficient institutional mechanisms to promote the advancement of women.

The Institute's Occasional Paper series for Beijing reflects work carried out under the UNRISD/UNDP project, **Technical Co-operation and Women's Lives: Integrating Gender into Development Policy**. The activities of the project include an assessment of efforts by a selected number of donor agencies and governments to integrate gender issues into their activities; the action-oriented part of the project involves pilot studies in Bangladesh, Jamaica, Morocco, Uganda and Viet Nam, the goal of which is to initiate a policy dialogue between gender researchers, policy makers and activists aimed at making economic policies and productive processes more accountable to women.

This paper, the first in the series, provides an introduction to "women and development" by tracing the main trends in the way women's issues have been conceptualized in the development context. Part I of the paper explains the emergence of women in development (WID) in the early 1970s, highlighting in particular a dominant strand of thinking within WID that sought to make women's issues relevant to development by showing the positive synergies between investing in women and reaping benefits in terms of economic growth. Even though making efficiency-based arguments proved to be effective as a political strategy for having women's issues taken up by donor agencies, it also entailed a number of controversial outcomes. An undue emphasis was placed on what women could contribute to development (at times based on exaggerated claims), while their demands from development for gender equity became secondary and conditional upon showing positive growth synergies.

Part II of the paper looks at the analytical and intellectual underpinnings of the shift from WID to GAD (gender and development). Gender is being used by researchers and practitioners in a number of different ways. The theoretical underpinnings and policy implications of two prominent frameworks for gender analysis (and training) — the "gender

roles framework” and “social relations analysis” — are discussed at some length. These frameworks are then linked to two relatively recent sets of literature on gender: the first on gender and efficiency at the macro-economic level, which shares several premises with the gender roles framework, and the second on women’s empowerment strategies, which can be seen as the action-oriented outgrowth of social relations analysis.

The authors highlight two main tensions that emerge from the different conceptualizations of gender. First, at the analytical level, there are critical differences in the extent to which the “togetherness” or “social connectedness” of husband and wife is given analytical weight; a pervasive feature of (predominantly neo-classical) economic models of gender is to use analogies from elsewhere in the economic repertoire, which tend to miss some important dimensions of togetherness characteristic of husband/wife relations. Second, at the political level, the extent to which the goal of “gender-aware” development is to be linked to “top-down” or “bottom-up” strategies remains controversial. While women’s NGOs and grassroots organizations have an important role to play in creating space for women to politicize their demands, there are serious limits to what institutions of civil society can achieve. The state still remains responsible for regulating macro-level forces in a more gender-equitable manner. It is with this point in mind that the possible points of convergence between top-down and bottom-up strategies can be explored by women and development advocates.

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Dharam Ghai
Director

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Abbreviations & Acronyms

| | |
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| DAWN | Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era |
| GAD | gender and development |
| ILO | International Labour Organisation |
| NGO | non-governmental organization |
| NHE | new household economics |
| SAP | structural adjustment programme |
| SEWA | Self-Employed Women's Association |
| UNCTAD | United Nations Conference on Trade and Development |
| UNDP | United Nations Development Programme |
| UNICEF | United Nations Children's Fund |
| UNIFEM | United Nations Development Fund for Women |
| WID | women in development |

Introduction¹

This paper sets out some of the main trends in the way women's issues have been conceptualized in the context of development over the past two decades. It begins with a discussion of the early WID (Women in Development) approach, highlighting in particular a dominant strand in WID thought that legitimated efforts to influence development policy with a combined argument for equity and economic efficiency. The emphasis on women's productive contributions, it was hoped, would convince planners to alter development practice so as to direct scarce economic resources to women. Although women's equity demands were thereby made "relevant" to the concerns of development planners and policy makers, the strategy also entailed a more controversial implication, one that prioritized what development needs from women over what women need from development. But WID produced more than just a political strategy; it also generated new research, including analytical evaluations of the impact on rural women of development projects.

The second part of the paper examines the shift in policy discourse from WID to GAD (Gender and Development). Gender, we argue, is being used in a number of different ways. Although the analyses of gender considered in this paper share some fundamental assumptions, there are also a number of significant points at which they diverge. One of the main tensions that emerges from our comparative account is the extent to which the "social connectedness" or "togetherness" of husband and wife are given analytical weight in analyses of gender relations. According to some accounts, the interrelations between men and women have conflictual **and** co-operative dimensions that must be taken into consideration if a "gender-aware" approach to development is to be realized.

The historical account set out in this paper illustrates some continuities in thinking on women/gender and development that link the early WID arguments of the 1970s to the analyses of gender and structural adjustment put forward by a number of neo-classical economists in recent years. The paper also refers to the emergence of a strong strand of feminist thinking within economics that challenges the appropriation of the concept of efficiency by neo-classical economics, and broadens the discourse of efficiency to argue for human and sustainable development. The evolution in thinking has also been punctuated by a number of shifts: from a focus on women-specific projects to mainstreaming women/gender at the programme and policy level; and more significantly, from a reliance on top-down planning to a growing emphasis on "bottom-up" or "participatory" development strategies signifying the growing politicization of the development agenda.

The reader should be aware that the discourses under scrutiny have emerged within specific political and institutional contexts: they are, for the most part, addressed to policy makers in state and donor agency bureaucracies. They seek, in their own way, to change the world, and that very often means using discourses that will inevitably look over-

simplified: campaigning for practical action often requires a bolder and simpler discourse than the complexities of empirical research. And yet there needs to be some continuity between the discourses that are used by academics, advocates and practitioners. It is with this latter point in mind that we make our way through the different texts described in the paper.²

PART I

Women in Development (WID)

In popular discourse, “Women in Development” (WID) is associated with the wide range of activities concerning women in the development domain, which donor agencies, governments and NGOs have become involved in since the 1970s. The 1975 World Conference of the International Women’s Year at Mexico City, and the United Nations Decade for Women (1976-1985), gave expression to the major preoccupations of women around the world: improved educational and employment opportunities; equality in political and social participation; and increased health and welfare services. In sum, the WID movement that emerged during this period demanded social justice and equity for women.

In this section we focus on a dominant strand of thinking within WID discourse, one that has attempted to make a connection between equity issues and development concerns. Instead of approaching policy makers with a range of demands for women, these WID advocates have adopted a strategy of “relevance”. In other words, their demands for the allocation of development resources to women hinge on economic efficiency arguments about what women can contribute to the development process. The convergence of equity and efficiency concerns in this strand of WID thought has provided the basis for a powerful political strategy. It has also had a lasting impact on the way in which development planners think about women. In the discussion that follows, we concentrate primarily on this strand of WID thought. However, where appropriate we also refer to other policy approaches to women identified in Moser’s (1993) fivefold schema — “welfare”, “equity”, “anti-poverty”, “efficiency” and “empowerment”.

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