

WOMEN AND DEVELOPMENT

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Keywords: Gender, women, development, inequality, empowerment

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Summary

This article focuses on how gender, as a socially constructed phenomenon, has been integrated into development practice. It examines the notion of “development” as generated by an economic paradigm that renders the work of women invisible. Further, it critiques the different ways in which women have been incorporated into development policies and program. An examination of issues facing women in the development process is undertaken. The article explores the processes of globalization that are operating at unprecedented levels and how they affect women in development. It raises the question of a crisis in development as a Western colonial project, and analyzes this from the perspective of social justice. It concludes with alternative visions for women in development in the future.

1. Introduction

Women constitute half of the world’s population. In 1948, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights reaffirmed the equal rights of men and women. Despite this, women experience considerable disadvantage and discrimination in societies perpetuating gender-differentiated structures. Gender is a socially constructed phenomenon, while sex is biologically determined. The meaning of “gender” varies from society to society and changes over time. Women are not a homogeneous group and their lives vary depending on the place in which they live as well as their age, social class, ethnic origin, and religion.

For all societies, the common denominator of gender is female subordination, although relations of power between men and women may be experienced and expressed in different societies and at different times. The United Nations (U.N.) Development Programme (UNDP) unequivocally concluded that no society treats its women as well its men. In 1985 it was reported to the U.N. Committee on the Status of Women that

women composed one-half of the world's population and performed two-thirds of the world's work hours, earned one-tenth of the world's income, owned less than one-hundredth of the world's property, and were everywhere poorer in resources and poorly represented in positions of power. Little has changed. The Human Development Index (HDI), constructed to measure achievements in basic human development across the world, measures gender inequality in terms of economic and political opportunity and gender empowerment in terms of participation and decision making. The 2001 HDI indicated that gender inequality was present in every country, although there were considerable variations across nations.

International development as an area of scholarly study can be traced back to the 1950s and post-World War II reconstruction. Based on neoclassical economic theory there emerged a "development project" that stressed aid-based planning to bridge the gap between industrialized and non-industrialized nations. The first U.N. development decade took place from 1961 to 1970. It is in this decade that the terms "less developed countries," "third world," and "developing countries" were created. These terms are problematic, as will be seen below.

Women's issues in development were subsumed under the question of human rights in the 1950s and 1960s. By the 1970s women's key position in the development process was more widely recognized. This was particularly so in relation to population growth and food security issues. Women's roles in society were viewed as important to consider in the development process, as policies and programs implemented often had adverse effects on women. Development strategies came under criticism from women practitioners for their failure to recognize the contribution women make to the economy in many developing countries while lacking political and social power. It was pointed out that, in all societies, men and women have different responsibilities for the tasks necessary for the survival and development of the community. However, within the existing division of labor, responsibility for the maintenance of human resources fell largely on women's shoulders. Gathering fuel and water, processing food, caring for the children, nursing the sick, and managing the household is heavy and time-consuming work. This is widely seen as a woman's role, and is economically not recognized. The recognition of this has led to the inclusion of gender in the development process as a key indicator, and the emergence of a series of terms as "women in development," "gender and development," and "women's development."

2. Critique of the Discourse of Development

The discussion of women in development requires a review of the discourse on development. A variety of approaches to development have emerged over the several decades of development practice. A growing body of critical literature has looked at the ideology and paradigm of development. The term development evokes a positive image, as something that is desirable. Often development has not been connected to the processes of capitalism despite the fact that it is intricately related to economics. Through the criticisms that are voiced from grassroots movements in the developing world against, for example, the construction of big dams, the destruction of rainforests, and the destruction of traditional forms of livelihood and agriculture in the name of

development, we have come to realize the connections between capitalism and development.

The main theme of development discourse focuses on the causes of deprivation and strategies to alleviate it. The orthodox paradigm of development sees deprivation as resulting from deficiencies in economic functioning and advocates economic growth as a way to overcome poverty, unemployment, and lack of income. This school of thought sees economic growth as the first step towards a “trickling down” and does not see the deprivation as resulting from unequal power between classes, regions, nations, or gender. This school advocates minimal intervention so that the economic system can function effectively with minimal interference. In reality, this growth-oriented approach has not worked out and has resulted in rising disparities in personal and regional incomes. It has resulted in worsening unemployment, reductions in social and public services, and increases in absolute and relative poverty. Some attempt has been made to correct the failings arising from the inadequacies of the market systems by channeling some benefits to the poor through a number of measures including employment generation, redirecting investment, meeting basic needs, human resource development, agriculture-first development, rural development, and changes to the policies of major international institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and changes to the system of tariffs.

Unlike the orthodox paradigm of development that focuses on economic growth as the goal and measure of progress, the political economy paradigm of development is concerned with the nature of the process by which economic growth is achieved. Applying Paulo Freire’s philosophy, this approach questions whether people and nations are the objects of development under someone else’s control or are subjects of development, in control of their own destiny. This approach sees the cause of deprivation as rooted in the capitalist system, whereby exploitation and powerlessness are embedded in the relationships between capitalists and workers. A subset of this thesis is world systems theory or dependency theory, which purports that capitalist developed countries are able to maintain their wealth and power because of the supply of cheap resources and labor from developing countries. The meaning of “underdevelopment” in these theories is that the developing country progressively becomes integrated with, and dependent on, the world market through trade and investment, and its production is geared to the demands of the world market, particularly markets in developed countries. This approach, while providing insight into the dominance of the West in the world system, is silent about gender. Women are ungendered beings who can escape oppression only through class politics, as this approach assumes that a description of global capitalist development is sufficient for understanding the victim status of people.

Development studies have closely focused on the nexus between modernization and development. Although these concepts derive from different intellectual ancestries, they converge when applied to this area. They share three key points. The first is that they refer to states of society. Theorists of modernization distinguish between traditional, transitional, and modernized societies. Theorists of development, on the other hand, speak of underdeveloped, developing, and developed societies. Both sets of theories articulate a set of goals and an agenda for action. Both concepts refer to a process, a

movement from tradition to modernity, and from underdevelopment to development. The criteria used to determine the state of societies mainly relate to gross national product (GNP) and the degree of industrialization. These approaches came under significant criticism in the last two decades of the twentieth century. A major criticism is that development is continuous and linear as set out by proponents of modernization and development. It has been pointed out that many countries do not necessarily follow linear pathways and modernization is not always deemed desirable. A second criticism is the application of economic criteria to judge progress rather than considering human needs and human development.

Other criticisms of development theories are related to the link between development and underdevelopment and the impact of development on those who are affected including women, nature, and the environment, and indigenous or colonized people. The first of these concerns relates to the dualistic thinking that categorizes in terms of the developed and the underdeveloped. This not only suggests that the future of the underdeveloped is for development and that development is a natural and evolutionary process. Using biological and historical progress metaphors, the development process was closely connected to industrial advancement. The division of the world into north-south, synonymous with developed and underdeveloped, established a vision for the developing world to adopt. This kept hidden that the so-called development of the industrialized nations was not a natural or evolutionary process but rather one based on violence, conquest, exploitation, and colonization, of not only foreign peoples and lands, but also of nature and women. The language used by international agencies, governments, and others reflect the old approaches to development. Many countries are still referred to as developing, developed, third world, and underdeveloped. The terms “north” and “south” were introduced as a way of addressing this problem, but this is still problematic since not all industrialized countries are in the Northern Hemisphere and not all developing countries are in the Southern Hemisphere. The language is inadequate and this is acknowledged in this article, as the terms developing and developed are reluctantly used here in the absence of suitable alternatives.

An additional criticism is that this discourse has not considered culture. Many cultures have different ways of envisaging life, happiness, and life that are not necessarily linked with notions of progress. However, many cultures, particularly indigenous cultures, have been degraded by models of social change based on consumption, competition, acquisition, and the introduction of the market economy. The Eurocentric process of development and Western consciousness has been criticized as bringing about irredeemable damage to cultures through processes of homogenization (through modernization), stripping people of their identity, their traditional independent means of livelihood, and by undermining their capacity for self-determination.

Out of these criticisms of development a number of dilemmas have emerged. These dilemmas are relevant in considering alternative futures for women in development. The first dilemma relates to development versus non-development. The disenchantment with existing development practice, and the failure of the promised results of development, has led many serious writers in developing countries to question the very idea of development. However, the rise in population rates, shortages of food, energy, and natural resources and their maldistribution, and the threats to the environment cast some

doubt on non-development approaches and whether these problems will disappear without conscious intervention of some kind.

The second dilemma relates to the nature of development; that is, endogenous versus exogenous development. One of the paradoxes of the modern world is the increasing homogeneity accompanied by the increasing return to ethnicity, religion, culture, and language. These realities in each country cannot be brushed aside and all efforts at development will need to respond to this. It is important to note that the objectives of development will be considerably influenced by endogenous factors as well as by outside factors such as institutions, ideas, and technologies. The mix of endogenous and exogenous factors has posed a dilemma for development practitioners and thinkers.

The third dilemma is self-reliance versus interdependence development. Countries differ in size of territory, population, and resources. Although countries aim to be self-reliant it is not completely possible. With globalization, there is a greater interconnectivity and it is no longer possible to be insular. New patterns of interdependence are emerging and changing based on a global economic order with developing countries still being in the patron-client relationship, resulting in subordination and dependency.

The fourth dilemma relates to economic growth versus distribution. The primacy of economic growth, particularly measured through GNP, has come under considerable criticism as it has failed to bring about social justice. The focus is now on issues of redistribution and equity. The dilemma relates to what will be redistributed if economic growth is not there; that is, what will societies distribute? Although the growth factor cannot be ignored, the questions relate to how growth is achieved and how the products of growth are shared.

The fifth dilemma relates to centralized planning versus the operations of the market. Should the targets and nature of development be decided by a central planning agency or should the market mechanism and price signals be left free to shape them? It is clear that the operation of the market has not proved very effective in development over the years. On the other hand, even the more centralized economies are showing sensitivity to operations of global market. This dilemma is also closely related to levels of mass participation and professionalism in society. Central planning requires professional planners. Democratic processes require informed participation of citizens in societal affairs. Thus, the appropriate balance of the market and central planning needs to be addressed in development processes.

The sixth dilemma relates to industrialization versus the environment. There is a close correlation between levels of industrialization and environmental destruction through, for example, pollution causing technology. Apart from the overuse of resources by richer countries relative to the rest of the world, it is known that poverty causes damage to the environment through pollution, over use of resources, and deforestation. Removal of poverty can contribute to improvements in the quality of the environment. However, it should be noted that it is greed and lack of foresight, particularly in developed countries, that has contributed to environmental problems in the world. Environmental consciousness has to be promoted in societies that are adapting technologies to developing economies. And developed countries need to devote a greater share of their

resources to producing technologies that are minimally polluting and non-wasteful of scarce, non-renewable resources.

Other dilemmas relate to industry versus agriculture, import substitution versus export promotion, and aid versus trade. The latter dilemma is tricky. Aid rarely comes without conditions attached that benefit the aid giver. Often aid has to be repaid with interest and can hardly be described as aid. The burden of international loans is so heavy that subsequent borrowings go into debt servicing, taking vital funds from public services. Trade is also on unequal terms. The stronger countries have protection for their own products while forcing lesser-developed countries into a regime of free trade. This system of trade needs urgent rectification as such trade negatively affects many of the poorer countries.

The final dilemma relates to physical investment versus investment in human capital. Often the results of physical investment are tangible and more immediate. However, these benefits will go to waste if human resources are not optimally positioned to make use of them. Human resources can be enriched by raising consciousness and by developing trained competence and skills through formal and informal education. In a climate of shrinking resources for human development, it is important to achieve the right mix of human and physical investment.

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Biographical Sketch

Hurriyet Babacan is a senior lecturer in social and community studies at University of the Sunshine Coast, Australia. She holds a number of qualifications from Australia including Bachelor of Commerce, Bachelor of Social Work, Master of Arts, and Graduate Certificate in Education. Ms. Babacan is currently completing her Ph.D. on social, personal, and political dimensions of identity in ethnic minority communities in Australia. Her research is complemented by a long history of employment in Australia including as an academic, researcher, policy officer, social worker, and consultant. Ms. Babacan's research and publication interests relate to ethnic minorities, social change, multiculturalism, racism and immigrant settlement, gender and society, issues in relation to training and employment, social welfare delivery, and aging and aged care.