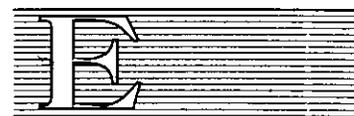


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**THE GENDER APPROACH TO
DEVELOPMENT PLANNING**

AN AFRICAN PERSPECTIVE

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THE GENDER APPROACH TO DEVELOPMENT PLANNING: AN AFRICAN PERSPECTIVE

1. INTRODUCTION :

1.1 It is now recognised that gender (being a woman or being a man) is a critical factor influencing the way women and men relate to each other in society, the roles they play, the status they occupy and consequently, their needs. It is, therefore, not enough to plan for society without taking into consideration how these plans will affect the women or men differently. The debate as to whether development planning and management should continue to follow a Women in Development perspective or a gender and development perspective is an important paradigm shift, recognising the complexity of factors which contribute to the inequalities between women and men.

In the last ten years, the gender approach to development has been defined, redefined and refined not only by academicians, but also by development workers and international donor agencies. The contribution of African women to the debate and refinement of the concept and methodology has been acknowledged. Because it stems from real life experiences and understanding that in Africa, women's lives are closely defined and influenced by their relations with men in their capacities as husbands, fathers, brothers, sons, uncles, and other men in-laws.

1.2 The paper will focus on the general gender inequalities in Africa as well as gender and development methodologies. However, this is not to ignore the fact that social-cultural and religious differences, different economic, as well as geographical contexts will influence variations in gender relations and related gender inequalities. The specific variations in each country can best be identified in a participatory process with all the key players. In this context, some of the fundamental questions that should guide country specific discussions are:

a. **What are the critical social cultural, political and economic factors which maintain the differences and inequalities between women and men?** (The answers to this will highlight the nature and causes of the persistent gender inequalities)

b. **How have the different institutions tried to address the identified inequalities?** (In answering this, the parties concerned will be defining some of the characteristics of the gender approach in their development planning)

c. **What concrete results have been achieved in the advancement of women in institutions at local and national levels, and how can these achievements be maintained?** (The results achieved will provide justification for integrating an effective gender approach in development.)

1.3 In order to set the context for more country specific discussions, this paper seeks to define **what** a gender approach is and how it differs from a women in development approach. The paper will also outline some of the reasons **why** a gender perspective must be integrated into development planning in Africa. Finally, suggestions will be made about **how to** integrate a gender perspective in development planning. A lot has been written and said about the what, why and how of gender approach. The paper has benefited from the wealth of research findings and writings that exist, on gender approaches in development.

2 *What are the key characteristics of a gender approach in development:*

A gender approach in development means that there is commitment to addressing women's and men's issues and concerns in an institution's activity. "Gender awareness is a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for incorporating gender considerations into operational procedures. Institutional change occurs only when an organisation makes the conscious commitment to address gender issues in the course of doing business. **This commitment must increase the likelihood that benefits accrue as equally as possible to men and women.** In addition, commitment can ultimately lead to addressing gender issues actively by alleviating or removing constraints to women's access to resources and decision making. "

Source: Genesys, 1994. Prepared by Deborah A. Caro and Virginia Lambert.

2.2 Preconditions

There are several preconditions to adopting an effective gender approach in development. The starting point is a clear understanding of gender, both as a concept as well as the practical implications of gender.

a. What is gender? Many writers have tried to define the concept of gender and to apply it to local distinctions between women and men. Gender is usually used to refer to the social and economic distinctions between men and women, presumably associated with their physical differences. The practical implication is that in cases where gender distinctions are made, there is “an observable duality which ‘sets off men and women under circumstances and conditions that prevent them from saying, doing, desiring and perceiving the same thing’”¹.

Gender is socially constructed, where a society essentially uses the physical differences between male and female to create two social classes, that of men and women. The distinctions between men and women (Gender) is a result of a social process in which women and men are assigned, and perceived to have different duties, attributes, privileges and positions. It is also this process which creates the basis for inequalities between women and men.

When it is understood that the differences between women and men are mainly socially constructed, it becomes clear that the bases of gender inequality can change from place to place, from time to time, and even according to context. For example, a division of labour between women and men, a difference in rights and privileges and even differences in access to resources are not determined by the biological characteristics of men and women on a permanent basis. The positive changes in the situation of women as well as in the division of labour in many sectors of development, in Africa, is proof for the changing nature of gender relations, roles and responsibilities as well as social perceptions about women’s and men’s position in society.

¹Hilda Mary K. Tadria, Changing Economic and Gender patterns among the Peasants of Ndejje and Sseguku in Uganda, PhD Thesis, 1985.

b. Gender awareness:

Another precondition for integration of a gender approach is a recognition that gender differences and inequalities mean that men and women will not benefit from development programs and policies equally. This recognition, commonly referred to as 'gender awareness', is an important step in institutionalising a gender approach in development. In Genesys, seven basic elements of a gender approach have been identified. These are useful practical indicators of whether development planning has a gender perspective or not. The elements are:

- i. awareness of the importance of gender issues for development outcomes;
- ii. commitment to addressing gender issues in activities;
- iii. capacity for carrying out gender and social analysis
- iv. capacity to formulate gender focussed questions
- v. capacity for applying the findings of gender and social analysis to the work;
- vi. capacity for systematic monitoring and evaluation of gender specific program impact;
- vii. systematic reporting of gender relevant lessons learnt, and subsequent program adaptation.

2.3 How does a gender approach differ from a women in development approach? A gender and development approach does not mean that a women specific program cannot be developed as an intervention for eliminating gender inequalities. A gender approach simply means that a program has developed as a result of a systematic analysis of a situation, looking at the differences between women and men with regard to roles as well as privileges, access to resources etc. and how the social, political and economic factors affect the women and men differently. On the basis of such an assessment, it may be found necessary to pay more attention to women, or to men.

The main reason that women seem to become the focus even in a gender approach to development is directly linked to the realities of most African societies. This reality is that when a gender assessment has been carried out, women are usually found to be more disadvantaged than men in the political, social and economic, and even religious arena. It is this nature

of the situation that leads to the focus on women in a gender approach.