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SOME THEORETICAL UNDERPININGS**

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## **GENDER ISSUES IN SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT: SOME THEORETICAL UNDERPININGS**

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### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Gender equality as a major development goal and as explicitly stated in many global policies, is a result of almost three decades of recognising, situating and assessing impacts of gender on various aspects of human life. Following the seminal work of Boserup (1970), a stream of feminist theoretical and conceptual positions have evolved and have been aimed at beaming an analytical torch on gender issues in social and economic development. Evolution of these concepts and theories are better known via the tag-names of Women in Development (WID), Women and Development (WAD), Gender in Development (GID and more recently, Gender and Development (GAD). While the first school of thought (WID) simply looks at the lives of women within the development space, or viewed women as objects of interest or subject of analysis (Feminist Africa, 2002), the WAD school went further to recognize the problems that face women within their given space in social and economic spheres as problems for development. The result of this was the development of 'turn key' programmes to alleviate the sufferings of women, mostly from a welfarist perspective.

Gender concepts rapidly advanced beyond these earlier schools of thought by shifting the understanding of issues beyond women and their problems to the problem of inequality between men and women and how such gaps short-changed capacities of women and their households. The earlier of the gender-based concepts (Gender In Development or GID) recognises gender inequality as a problem and recommends empowerment tools to close gaps. Gender and Development – (GAD) further sees gender equality not only as an issue of social equity but also as a cost to the development process and the centrality of closing gender gaps as the only way to move development forward in a sustainable way. Integration of gender in the mainstream of development thinking is a sine qua non for pre-empting such negative effects. This is in the sense that, inequality of capabilities, assets and opportunities of segments of the population, short-changes efficiency of the mainstream of economies, reinforces national poverty profiles and impacts negatively on growth (Seguino, 2000).

This shift in understanding advocates a change in the ways that institutions of development function so as to be aware of the gendered nature of social and economic processes and their outcomes. That is, promoting gender-awareness of development institutions and processes and constantly strategising to ensure that policies are made with such consciousness. This is gender mainstreaming.

*“Gender mainstreaming ... brings into a development issue the different policy implications, perspectives and priorities of women and men. This helps to inform the design, implementation and assessment of policies and programmes related to the development issue in a gender-sensitive way. It is a critical strategy in the pursuit of gender equality which is a development goal as well as a rounded achievement of other development goals...”* **Status of Women Canada**

Gender mainstreaming is now central to all policy structures and programmes including Poverty Reduction Strategies (PRS), Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) as well as fiscal policies at national levels via gender budgets.

planning can only go so far in addressing human development and poverty reduction and the greatest threat “**broad-based and sustainable economic growth**” is the above disconnect – failure to integrate gender equality goals with macroeconomic growth. This is because of faulty theories that shape development goals and which create gender-blind policies. In the next section, we briefly discuss the theoretical fallacies that have created gender-blindness and inequalities and the social and economic environment within which these theories and policy fall-outs are situated.

### **3. A GENDER BLIND WORLD: THEORETICAL ISSUES AND CONSEQUENCES**

In attempting to centralize gender, the integrationist approach has been based on the assumption that “women’s problem was insufficient participation and otherwise benevolent process of growth and development” (Sen and Grown 1987). Thus it was assumed that targeting projects to change the situation of women through income-generating projects would effect dramatic improvements. Statistics over the decades have shown otherwise. The reason has been the difficulty of overcoming traditional and cultural attitudes and prejudices regarding the roles of women admen in society. Grossly overlooked has been the nature of the development process itself, as conceptualised by economic theories. What do these economic growth theories tell us?

#### **3.1 Early Theories of Economic Growth**

Neo-classical economic development theories have focused on the achievements of major growth aggregates including full employment, price stability, healthy external balance, and equitable income distribution as the major goals of development. All these are premised on the key role ascribed to markets in shaping the supply and demand for goods and services by economic agents viz individuals, firms and government. Access to income and consumption depends on access to productive assets – land, labour and capital, with government playing a mediating role in stabilising, redistribution and compensation between these agents. The activities of these agents activate a circular flow of income whose efficient management through government policies promotes production, consumption, savings, investment and trade (Keynes, 1936, 1965).

This central view of income creation and distribution was however gender blind. The role of the state in its redistribution through transfers was based on households as units of production and consumption rather than individuals within them. Thus intra-household dynamics and bargaining which determines entitlement to factors of production and access to produces goods and services within households were lost to analysis. As a result, a mere ‘trickle’ down effect from ‘workers’ to ‘non-workers’ and from state resources to communities and households *appeared to be sufficient* to ensure even spread of the benefits of growth. Inter-household relations at the community level were also not considered in the way that community systems and networking generated sets of socially determined gender roles and access that disadvantaged women, compared to men, in the capacity to produce and ability to access consumption goods and services (Elson, 1995). The fact that economic agents themselves are made up of men and women, both as household heads, managers of firms and representatives of the state (government agents) was also ignored. The inequality factors that determined economic participation, contribution and benefits were thus lost to early theories of economic development.

These orthodox theories based on the notion of “all things being equal” gave no room for the consideration of social, cultural and political factors that determined access to the development arena and which reinforced existing inequalities between men and women and fostered feminized poverty. Heterodox economic theories such as Marxism, socialism, feminism were seen to be “leftist” and in as much as they purported why ‘things are not always equal’ these heterodox theories never made

and programmes is that men and women are located at different sectors of the economy, faced with different incentive structures and different constraints. Therefore, outcomes are essentially different, often being more negative for women than men due to more limited safety nets in form of assets.

Some of the factors that account for these differences include discrimination in the labour markets, gender stereotypes of norms and values and communal decisions that channel men/women, boys/girls into different activities within the same sector. Other factors include the burden of subsistence and welfare provisioning that is placed asymmetrically on women when economic reforms lead to scarcity of social welfare services and there is withdrawal of government subsidies for basic needs production (e.g. food). Gender inflicts rigidity of movement more for women between activities and between sectors because women's reproductive roles limit their time for market production and the flexibilities entailed.

#### **4.0 THE WAY FORWARD – ENGENDERING POLICY MODELS**

##### **What are the key theoretical issues to be addressed?**

The summary effects of gender assignments on men and women which require strategic configuration within macroeconomic planning and which require change within institutions are as follows:

- Women's reproductive work is a 'tax' on their labour input which is not remunerated or recognised in the distribution of the output of labour;
- Gender inequalities impact negatively on economic growth on one hand by reducing the quality of human capacity while in the other, gender inequalities fuel economic growth through the indirect taxing of women's labour in the market economy
- The absence of a framework to quantify the 'taxes' and 'subsidies' from women to households, i.e. between the market and non-market domains of engagement, reinforces the invisibility of women's work (the care economy)
- The recognition of different domains of activity (within the home and outside the home; market-bound and non-market bound output; informal and formal sectors, reproductive and productive) will be an important means of assessing the role of all agents to the economic growth and the distribution of benefits from economic growth.
- Macroeconomic policies are best assessed for their effectiveness through the micro-economic effects (i.e. social and economic changes that take place at the household level and in the lives of individual economic agents).
- The roles that social networks, societal norms and values play in shaping the functioning of markets imply that markets are social institutions and that attention to social and cultural barriers to growth are as important as the economic factors.
- Economic theories that do not adequately consider the human, social and cultural dimensions of development and create indicators to monitor these dimensions are unlikely to lead to improved human quality of life and gender equity, in spite of macro-economic growth.

A gender-aware model of the economy will recognize the activities in both the productive and reproductive factors (Elson, 1995b). This is in terms of the flow of unpaid services, non-purchased goods and voluntary work (within communities) as well as atypical work for which market value is not assigned e.g. housemaid, elderly care and so on. A gendered vision of the macro-economy will recognize that gender of economic agents matter. The outflow of goods and services from a male or female or female agent in the household or a male or female-managed firm or the decisions that are made by a male or female agent of government (policy maker) lead to differential outcomes for the economy. Contemporary visions of the economy also recognise this dichotomy and view the 'hidden'

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