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Conceptual Background

From Women in Development to Gender and Development

Gender mainstreaming, as a strategy, has developed out of a major shift in the focus of efforts to promote gender equality and equity in recent years. This shift has been away from the women in development (WID) approach, towards the gender and development (GAD) approach.

The WID approach focused on how women could be better integrated into existing development initiatives. Targeting women's productive work to the exclusion of their reproductive work, this approach was characterised by income-generating projects for women which failed to address the systemic causes of gender inequality. It tended to view women as passive recipients of development assistance, rather than as active agents in transforming their own economic, social, political and cultural realities. A key outcome was that women's concerns were viewed in isolation, as separate issues, leading to their marginalisation in the state system and other social structures.

Barriers to equality are socially constructed and maintained by a complex array of historical, ideological, cultural, economic and religious influences which are difficult but not impossible to change. Gender roles, relations and inequalities vary across cultures and through different times in human development; thus they are amenable to change.

A GAD framework is more likely to result in:

- ✦ the recognition that women and men have different and special needs;
- ✦ the recognition that women cannot be effectively treated as a homogeneous group because race/ethnicity, class, age, disability and sexual orientation, among other factors, create differences among women and between women and men;

The Commonwealth Plan of Action summarises the shift of focus from Women in Development (WID) to Gender and Development (GAD) as follows:

“WID policies aim to integrate women into existing structures and address women’s specific needs and concerns. The focus is on how women must change to fit into an essentially ‘man-made’ world ... GAD, on the other hand, seeks to integrate gender awareness and competence into mainstream development to account for the different life courses and different impacts of development policies on women and men. It emphasises that development activities may affect women and men differently and calls for appropriate ‘gender planning’ to address them. It also calls attention to ‘outcomes’, and the need to take the necessary steps to ensure that the resulting conditions and outcomes are equitable, rather than being preoccupied with giving only identical treatment. In summary, the GAD approach focuses not only on the differences between men and women but on the inequalities that emanate from these differences: women and their allotted roles have been historically undervalued and continue to be so up to the present time”.

Commonwealth Secretariat,
1995a: 14

- ◆ the recognition that women tend to be disadvantaged relative to men in terms of their welfare and their access to and control over the means of production;
- ◆ the recognition of the systemic and structural nature of inequality;
- ◆ the commitment to a process whereby development interventions work towards women’s and men’s increased empowerment and equality (Longwe, 1991: 150); and
- ◆ the recognition that gender differences can also result in men being disadvantaged. For example, the issue of male under-achievement in Caribbean education systems is beyond the scope of the WID approach, but can be addressed through GAD. Tracking gender equality in sector-specific data makes it possible to examine the comparative positions of women and men in relation to, for example, health, education, family structures, the labour market and earnings/income. ‘Gender equality tracking’ is thus a type of gender analysis that is useful in enabling appropriate policy interventions to be made in a timely manner to promote gender equality and equity in either direction.

Some Useful Concepts in Gender Analysis

Practical and strategic gender needs

Because men and women have different roles and responsibilities, they also have different needs – gender needs. These can be further divided into practical and strategic gender needs.

Practical gender needs emanate from the actual conditions women experience due to the roles ascribed to them by society. Often, these needs are related to women's roles as mothers, homemakers and providers of basic needs. Projects can meet the practical gender needs of both men and women without necessarily changing their relative position in society.

Strategic gender needs are what is required to overcome the subordinate position of women to men in society and relate to women's empowerment. Such needs vary according to the economic, political, social and cultural context. Most governments now acknowledge the need to create opportunities which enable women to address their strategic needs.

Gender-sensitive policies

Government policies may fall into one of three possible types: gender-neutral, gender-specific or gender-aware/redistributive/transformative. These can be distinguished as follows :

- ♦ **Gender-neutral policies** are those that are seen as having no significant gender dimension. However, government policies seldom if ever have the same effect on women as they do on men, even if at first sight they may appear to exist in a context where gender is irrelevant. Policies which may appear to be gender-neutral are often in fact gender-blind, and are biased in favour of males because they presuppose that those involved in and affected by the policy are males, with male needs and interests.
- ♦ **Gender-specific policies** take into account gender differentials, and target women or men specifically, but leave the current distribution of roles and resources intact.
- ♦ **Gender-aware/redistributive/transformative policies** seek to transform existing gender relations by changing the distribution of resources and responsibilities to make it more equitable. These policies are the most politically challenging, because

they involve altering the existing balance of power between men and women, but they also go the furthest towards addressing both practical gender needs and strategic gender interests (adapted from Kabeer, 1994).