

RESEARCH NOTE

GENDER AND DEVELOPMENT: GLOBAL DEBATE ON NEPAL'S DEVELOPMENT AGENDA

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The Global Development Debate on Women

Women as a category had entered into the United Nations' agenda since its very onset. The Commission on Status of Women (CSW) was established at United Nations (UN) in 1946 as a subsidiary body of the Economic and Social Council (ESC). This Commission was to create guidelines and formulate actions to improve the situation of women in the economic, political, social, cultural, and educational fields. During this period, concern for women was more of a protective nature rather than status oriented. As early as 1954, UN called on governments to abolish discrimination against women as stated in the principle of the UN Charter (1945), i. e., equality on the basis of race, sex, language, or religion.

During the 1960s, the issues of women's movement/feminist movement in the West were mainly on their reproductive rights (abortion, contraception, parenting), violence against women, sex discrimination, and freedom from the sexual domination. During this period, women also critiqued the UN's protective approach to women.

Recognition of Women as Agents of Development

In 1970, Esther Boserup's book, *Women's Role in Economic Development*, was published. Based on an extensive research work carried out in various developing countries of Asia, Latin America, and Africa about the role that women played in their respective economies. Boserup's work documents the extent of women's contribution to the national economy. Her research also establishes the fact that these women have been ignored as development

agents. Because the so-called development pundits are mostly Western white men who assume Third World women's role to be similar to that of their own women in the West. She argues that Western white men assume Third World women to be housewives rather than development agents. This resulted in Third World women being marginalized from development arena. This insight brought a whole new perspective on concerns for women within the development arena. The term "Women in Development" (WID) was then coined by the Women's Committee of the Chapter of the Society for International Development (SID) at Washington, D. C.

This new perspective also instigated change in UN's approach to women, which resulted in shifting its focus on women from protection-oriented approach to status-oriented approach. The UN's realization of women's marginalization from the mainstream development resulted in its direct approach to women. The declaration of 1975 as the "International Year of Women" followed by the declaration of the "Decade for Women (1976-1985)", marks the change in UN's focus on women.

With the WID approach the focus on the role of women shifted from the reproductive role to that of their productive role. The argument upon women's concerns was based on the assumption that women were marginalized from the development arena. Issues of their heavy work burden, low productivity, and low efficiency were raised. Advocacy during this period centred around women's access to services, such as education, health, training, and technology.

Considering the above assumption and advocacy, policies were formulated to enhance women's efficiency and productivity. Women-specific programmes were launched on literacy/education/training, technology development and dissemination, providing health services. The WID policies and programmes emphasized "improving the condition" of women without really questioning the distributive aspect of the productive resources and/or without questioning the existing capitalist mode of production system.

Move Towards Equity Approach

It was during the late 1970s that the feminist interjection was made into WID approach. Feminists argued that the term "Women In Development" gave a false notion as if women were outside of the economy and/or society and that they were to be integrated into the development. They asserted that women were always agents of development, hence the bottom line was the imperative

of "women for development" rather than the other way round of "development for women". The movement was that of Women and Development (WAD), i.e., a question of equity rather than Women in Development (WID), i.e., the question of integration.

Feminists with Neo-Marxist and Socialist orientation argued that there existed a patriarchal super-structure cross cutting all social, economic, legal and political structures. They argued that unless and until a change was brought into overall structures, providing women with (mere) education/training, health services, and technology was not going to bring any substantive change. They further argued that women were exploited through their unpaid work and they were barred from access to productive resources (Buvinic 1983; Loutfi 1982; Rogers 1979). The advocacy expanded to women's access to productive resources. They demanded that there needed to be a structural adjustment from patriarchal to equitable for both men and women. Furthermore, the WAD discourse also included the debate of inequalities/inequities between the North and the South and the resultant impoverishment, inequality and marginalization of women in developing countries (Beneria and Sen 1981; Mohanty 1991a; Sen and Grown 1987; Tiano 1987; Young 1993). Hence, the WAD imperatives are both structural adjustments between nations and within nations. WAD discourse questions the distributive aspects of both the international economic order and the intra-national gender order. Additionally, WAD questions the capitalist mode of production system and the resultant appropriation of women's (unpaid) labour.

With WAD advocacy, policies were formulated based on equity approach. Programmes were developed focusing on women's access to credit and employment. Emphasis was also given to women's equal participation in development. Additional programmes were launched on awareness creation for women about their relative position and recognition of their inherent potentials. So the emphasis was not only on improving the condition of women from bad to better but also changing their position from sub-ordinate to equal as men.

Paradigm Shift Towards Gender and Development (GAD)

The women's movement of 1960s that started and prevailed in the West expanded to be global during the 1970s and spread widely in terms of the dialogue and debate during 1980s. Two kinds of women's movements—the

feminist movement of the West and the Third World WID movement—came into conversing points during late 1970s and 1980s. Various world conferences on women contributed to women all over the world to converge and converse.

Within the Western Feminism, the Post Modernists/Post Structuralists questioned the basic assumption of the “universal feminism” within Liberal Feminism and the Marxist Feminism. The acknowledgment of “plurality” among women by Post Modernist/Post Structuralist feminists contributed to the understanding of different problems needing differential treatment for women from different race, class, ethnicity and sexual orientation (Beasley 1999; Mandell 1998). The Third World WID advocates/practitioners and feminists alike further argued that the Third World women’s oppression and discrimination could not be isolated from the consequences of colonialism. They further argued that the Western feminism was ‘hegemonic’ and ‘white ethnocentric’ and they detested Western feminists’ viewing of Third World women as ‘victims’ and/or ‘beneficiaries’ (Mohanty 1991a and 1991b). In fact, the First (at Mexico City, 1975) and the Second (at Copenhagen, 1980) World Conferences on Women did not go smoothly in terms of the dialogue between the women of the First World and the Third World. The North-South issue came up as a matter of strong contention. Women from the South challenged the notion of “global sisterhood” saying that not all women shared an identical interest. The interest of the women from the First World was “equality”, while it was “development” for the women from the Third World, and it was “peace” for the women from the Second World, i. e., the Socialist Block. The theme of world conferences and the decade for women as “Equality, Development and Peace” were, in fact, a compromise between the interests of women from all three worlds. It was only during the Third World Conference (at Nairobi, 1985) after a long dialogue and debate that a common ground was established on the basis that women’s category varied according to the political and the economic context and that “women are not homogeneous”. The activists, academics, and development practitioners alike critiqued each other’s view points, modified their own standpoints, and converged into a common platform which is based on “diversity” rather than “homogeneity” (Basu 1995; Friedan 1976; Kabeer 1994; Women’s Feature Service 1992).

The Decade (1976-85) and the World Conferences on Women to follow provided ample opportunities to dialogue, debate, and discourse to come up

with all encompassing perspective on women's concerns. So, it was in the form of a global feminist movement that brought "gender" as the central theoretical thinking and research. A "gender perspective in development" was then brought into effect with an argument that to bring women into the centre stage of development the existing gender relations need to be re-examined and reconstructed.

The background built up by tabling of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) at the UN in 1981 and subsequent ratification by various countries in the years to follow gave an added impetus to the advocacy of gender equity and equality. The Nairobi Forward Looking Strategies (1985) also revealed that development concerns could not compartmentalize women's diverse preoccupations and issues as "women specific" problems. During this period "empowerment approach" came forth as means to achieve gender equity and equality.

Gender and Development in 1990s

Upon the common ground built up during the 1980s, gender concern was founded as a crucial imperative in all development and human rights conventions. The Rio Earth Summit (1992) put forward the inter-relationship of women with the environment and their dynamic role in sustainable development. At Vienna Conference (1993) women's rights were recognized to be human rights, and that human rights and sustainable development were not two separate spheres but complementary. This led to the use of women's human rights framework to achieve sustainable development. In the Cairo ICPD (1994) women's empowerment, their reproductive health and reproductive rights were placed at the centre of population and development policies. At Copenhagen Social Summit (1994) gender equality was recognized to be the key to eliminate poverty and enhance social development. The Beijing Conference (1995) among 12 critical areas of concern, identified women's human rights, violence against women and women in armed conflict also as areas of development concern. "The girl child" as a special category of women was brought into focus during Beijing Conference. So, women's empowerment and women's rights were established as the key to development during 1990s (Harcourt 1999; Whelan 1998). After Beijing, the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) identified, i) globalization and impact on women, ii) science, technology and women in the new information age, iii) women in the leadership, and iv) human security and

social protection of women as four emerging key issues, which were to be addressed at the advent of the millennium.

So in the 1990s within the framework of women's human rights, concerns like environment, violence against women, etc., are also incorporated as women's development concern along with education, health, technology, employment, and access to and control over productive resources. The 1970s' focus on women was readjusted from women's productive role to their "triple role" (productive, reproductive, and community/social roles). The advocacy also evolved from efficiency approach (during 1970s) to equity approach (during 1980s) to equality and empowerment approach (in early 1990s) and then into rights approach (in late 1990s).

To operationalize the Beijing Platform for Action, mainstreaming gender concern in all development endeavours was recognized as the strategic imperative, which got reinforced in the Beijing +5 Outcome Document. There was a shift in development programmes from "women specific programmes" to "gender responsive/sensitive programmes". The sensitization and agency of men for women's concern was also perceived. Affirmative actions and positive discrimination in favor of women for equity and equality were articulated. With the advent of the democratic movement into the world politics, the emphasis on promoting women's "self determination" through their political empowerment was strongly recommended.

Women's Concerns in Nepal's Development Agenda

During early 1950s, Nepal experienced its first democratic political system. During this period Nepal became a member of the United Nations and it also formulated its first five-year plan for economic development in 1956. Women as a category were considered then as development beneficiaries. Focus on women was on their reproductive role as housewives and mothers. In 1956 Women Training Centre was established in the Ministry of Panchayat and Local Development. Training of trainers was conducted mainly in home economics/science, such as nutrition, childcare, family planning, knitting and sewing, kitchen gardening and poultry raising (Pradhan 1979) .

Into the Global Bandwagon

Nepal actively participated in the International Women's Year and the First World Conference on Women in Mexico City in 1975. In the same year marking the occasion, Nepal amended *Muluki Ain* (National Code) to grant

inheritance right to daughters if they remained unmarried up to the age of 35 years. In 1977, Women Service Coordination Committee (WSCC) was established at the Social Service National Coordination Council (SSNCC) with an objective of expanding development and welfare activities for women.

The Status of Women Study conducted by the Centre for Economic Development and Administration at Tribhuvan University in 1979 produced a series of documents on both academic and policy value. This mammoth research work, for the first time, documented the contribution made by Nepalese women to the national economy and became instrumental towards sensitizing policy makers to the recognition of women's productive role, which contributed in the inclusion of a separate WID chapter in the Sixth Five-Year Plan (1980-1985). In this Plan, with the recognition of women's productive role, an "efficiency approach" was adopted towards women in development. In order to operationalize the WID policy formulated in the Sixth Plan, the Women Development Section (later upgraded to a Division) was established at the Ministry of Panchayat and Local Development in 1980. In the same year Nepal participated in the Second World Conference on Women at Copenhagen. Returning back from Copenhagen and committing to WID, the Plan of Action for Women in Development was formulated by WSCC at SSNCC in 1982.

In 1985, the Seventh Five-Year Plan in addition to the "efficiency approach" took "participatory approach" to WID policy committing to make women active participants of development. The same year Nepal participated in the Third World Conference on Women at Nairobi and intended its commitment to the Nairobi Forward Looking Strategy. In 1988 Women Development Division was established at the Ministry of Labour with an objective of raising the efficiency and productivity of women labour force.

Establishment of Democracy and Transformation in Women's Advocacy

The Democratic Movement of 1990 marked a clear change in WID not only in terms of its approach but also the concept and the scope. Though it is difficult to assert that there is full-fledged women's movement in Nepal, the democratic political atmosphere definitely provided opportunities for Nepalese women to express their feminist consciousness and advocacy. After the restoration of democracy, scores of women's non-government organizations were formed and became active in the implementation of

development programmes, women's awareness raising and advocacy. A strong ground for advocacy was constructed when the democratic Constitution of 1991 provided Nepalese women with the "right to equality" with men. The ratification of the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination (CEDAW) without reservation in 1991, armed Nepalese women with an additional advocacy tool.

At the governmental level, WID Chapter in the Eighth Five-Year Plan (1992-1997) emphasized the "Mainstreaming Policy". This resulted in the establishment of WID units and other WID functionaries in various ministries and the National Planning Commission itself. Women Farmers' Development Division was established at the Ministry of Agriculture in 1992. In 1993, Child and Women Development Section was established at the National Planning Commission; Women Education Unit was established at the Ministry of Education; and the WID cell was established at Water and Energy Commission Secretariat in the Ministry of Water Resources. The National Council for Women and Child Development was established at the National Planning Commission in 1995.

During this time Nepal participated in the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, China in 1995. Marking the occasion, a large group of women from Nepal participated in the NGO Forum at Huariou City of China. It provided an opportunity to Nepalese women to build up networking globally and strengthen women's advocacy within Nepal. Immediately after Beijing Conference, the Ministry of Women (and Social Welfare) was established in 1995. Soon after its establishment, the Ministry declared its policy as "Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment" and became active in programme formulation and implementation, drafting of bills and sensitization/awareness creation activities that were to lead towards gender equality and women's empowerment. One such remarkable activity that the Ministry performed was the drafting of Women's Equality Bill in 1996 and forwarding it to the Ministry of Law and Justice. In the same year, the Ministry organized a "National Women's Convention" participated by more than five hundred women representing all 75 districts of Nepal. The Ministry also formulated the "Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women: National Plan of Action (NPA)" to operationalize the Beijing Platform for Action in 1996. The Ninth Five-Year Plan (1997-2002) made its commitment to women by stipulating its working policies as mainstreaming, gender equality and women's empowerment.

In the academic arena, WID was incorporated as one paper in Home Science, Masters' Degree curriculum at Tribhuvan University in 1990. This established WID as a body of knowledge with an academic value. Realizing its academic value and recognizing its technical/professional need and viability, the Post-Graduate Diploma in Women's Studies was instituted at Tribhuvan University in 1996. Similarly, many NGOs and private (consulting) companies became active in research and training programmes in gender and development. This way, academic exercises are also continuing to contribute to gender and development understanding and practice.

Critique

Initially, the WID approach was that of integrating women into development, and it emerged as a project and/or programme focused approach. The focus on women was mainly accommodated in the anti-poverty approach endorsing the World Bank's 'Redistribution with Growth' strategy and the ILO's 'Basic Needs' strategy. In this way, the WID policy approach was less threatening and more tolerable to male-dominated agencies in both donors and host countries. These programmes demanded minimal change in the existing structure in terms of gender hierarchy. However, in the 1980s, the academics/scholars, women's advocates and activists pointed out that it is not so much a question of women's issues in isolation but in relation to men. They pointed out that the patriarchal superstructure is overbearing the social, economic, political and legal structures leading to women's sub-ordination, subjugation and appropriation. They demanded that male-biased institutions, especially those unfavourable to women, be transformed arguing that a mere transformation of the reproductive economy to facilitate women's participation in the productive economy (i. e., efficiency approach) is not enough. A need to transform the productive economy itself (i. e., equity and equality approach) was recognized seeking structural adjustment (Elson 1995; Kabeer 1994; Moser 1993; Young 1993). It has created a lot of discomfort in male-dominated structures in the host countries, in the donor world, and the whole UN system. It is manifested by the snail pace of the operationalization of "mainstreaming" (which originated during the mid-1980s) except for a few countries especially the Nordic countries.

WID entered placidly in Nepal's development agenda and policies in the later half of the 1970s and 1980s centred about welfare approach and efficiency approach. As it approached towards 1990s, Nepal's changed

political environment towards democracy, its widening international commitment and the augmentation of a powerful national advocacy fueled a stronger demand for gender equity and gender equality. It has created a lot of uneasiness and annoyance among and between decision-makers and women's advocates. On the one hand, bills such as Muluki Ain Sansodhan Bill for women's equality and the Abortion Bill tabled in the 11th Session of the Parliament in 1997 speaks loudly about the length of women's advocacy for equality and right. This endeavour to some extent, received support at certain political and bureaucratic levels. Otherwise, the bills would not reach there. On the other hand, these Bills to be lapsed, to be reformulated and renamed, to be re-tabled but to receive minimum priority in Parliamentary discussions and voting during the 15th and 16th sessions speaks even louder about the extent of the reluctance and resistance at the higher political level.

Similarly, though the government policies seemingly became more progressive over the years (1980-1997, Sixth to Ninth Five-Year Plans) nothing concrete was accomplished to match the policy with action. In 1980, the Sixth Plan committed to raise the efficiency of women. In 1985, the Seventh Plan further committed towards equal participation of women on the same footing as with men in the development process. In 1992, the Eighth Plan committed to make women participate in the mainstream of development, while in 1997, the current Ninth Plan has made the commitment of gender equality and women's empowerment. Although there has been some crucial initiatives targeted to women since 1980s' nothing concrete has been achieved in changing women's condition and position. Some remarkable initiatives are micro-credit programmes, awareness and sensitization programmes and adoption of gender mainstreaming methodology in data base and the endeavour to engender the Census 2001. However, almost all of these endeavours are rather peripheral than central. The central issues such as amendment of discriminatory laws, bringing a critical mass of women in decision-making positions and making women equal partners in development agenda setting remained abated.

In the period of almost two decades (Sixth Plan to Ninth Plan), though the policies took up radical steps from efficiency approach to equality and empowerment approach, the development actions spiraled deeper down into the whirlpool of conservative welfare approach. During the budget allocation of fiscal year 2000/2001, out of the total budget only 0.29% was allocated to the Ministry of Women, Children and Social Welfare. Within the Ministry

also, only 38% was allocated to development programmes for women. Similarly, within other line agencies the budget allocated to women's programmes are minimal resulting in the total allocation of budget to women specific programmes to be just 0.48% of the total budget (Bhadra 2001). The Ministry of Defense received 4.25% of the total budget, which is almost nine times more than the budget allocated to all women specific programmes, speaks loud of the lack of governmental commitment for women's empowerment.

Beyond 2000: The Elementary Critical Mass

The advocacy for WID and GAD has evolved from welfare and efficiency of women to equality, empowerment and rights of women. The Beijing +5 review, "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century" strongly reaffirmed the commitments made in Beijing Platform for Action with inclusion of additional emerging issues. The Outcome Document of the review stipulated timeframe to end discrimination against women by requesting member States to eliminate legislative gaps through removal of discriminatory laws by 2005. In addition, agenda for signing the Optional Protocol to CEDAW was also put forward as one of the greatest achievements in the area of human rights of women (Preliminary Analysis of the Beijing +5 Outcome Document, June 2000, accessed through internet).

However, to achieve the preferred transformation women's advocacy needs to be more intense in holding the States accountable. Noeleen Heyzer, the chief of United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), confirms that the priorities of women in the 21st century are anchored in two key concerns; the economic empowerment of women and the political empowerment of women. It comprises ample food for thought to Nepalese women.

The economic empowerment is to get hands on those productive resources of which women's share was unjustly appropriated. The political empowerment is to get into positions of power from where policies and laws are formulated, executed and monitored by women, recognizing the rightful agency of women. On the one hand, a critical mass (at least one-third) of women as political decision-makers needs to be at every level (local to national) of decision making. On the other hand, women are also realizing their power as electorates. Nepalese women are already questioning, "Why

should we vote for those who sit on our bills? Is not it a time that we speak political language? Is not it a time that we use our electorate power to have our kinds and the kinds who realize and recognize women as human at the apex bodies of decision-making?"

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