



Gender Mainstreaming and The Shift in the Feminist Developmental Paradigm.

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Abstract

This essay engages in a comparative critique of Women In Development (WID) and Gender And Development (GAD). It takes the view that while GAD offers a more comprehensive picture of subordination to the development discourse, it has its own limitations and often translates into practice in a way that mimics WID. The essay questions certain core assumptions underlying WID and GAD with reference to hegemony and social justice.

Exploring the Definitions WID and GAD

Before one attempts to define WID and GAD, it must be acknowledged that it is never too convenient, nor is it entirely helpful or useful, to try and capture definitive, concrete meanings of what each would imply. During their lifespans, both WID and GAD were reinvented, morphed, reimagined and contested - and these contestations both arose from, and contributed towards new and radical feminist thinking in the Development Paradigm.

Women in Development was based on the notion that women occupied an inequitable position in society and the development process. An early iteration of this idea was

captured in Ester Boserup's observations on the subordinating nature of sexual division of agrarian labour. It was argued further that the modernization process had differential impacts on men and women which compounded these pre-existing inequities.

The rejuvenation of feminist movements for equity in the global north demanded legal and administrative changes to ensure that women were integrated better into economic systems (Rathgeber 1990). WID encapsulates "A set of ideas, policies and a discourse on giving primacy to women's productive roles and integration into the economy as means of improving their socioeconomic status". (Razavi & Miller 1995).

Gender and Development emerged as a radical feminist challenger to WID. The GAD movement questioned the adequacy of focusing on women in isolation (Razavi & Miller 1995) and instead sought to focus on gender relations as an analytical category (Levy 1996).

It was embraced, partly owing to the powerful questions it raised about WID's institutional myopia, homogenising discourse, disregard for oppression whilst singularly focusing on poverty, exclusive focus on women and a lack of a comprehensive sociological appraisal of class, race, culture and household politics.

WID, GAD and Contextual Awareness of Principle Terminology.

In defining and critiquing WID and GAD, one must be cognisant of the fact that 'Women', 'Men' and 'Gender' too, are not straightforwardly neutral, descriptive identifiers - they are in fact normative, subjectivist and value based socio-political statements that are intrinsically tied to cultural aspirations of a society.

Henceforth, the reality is, despite any attempt at theoretical precision and clarity in policy, the discourse, implementation and execution of both WID and GAD approaches are subject to change, reimagining, and reinterpretation at the disposal of variegated positionalities and exigencies of "society to society, culture to culture, ministry to ministry, and one development practitioner to another." (Levy 1996).

Caren Levy (1996) also notes that "The WID approach, which emerged out of the First UN Conference for Women, 1975-1985, has not reflected a homogeneous policy over the last 20 years." Razavi and Miller (1995) share similar opinions on how both WID and GAD present themselves in many shapes and gamuts across the development industry.

It is important to stress that this essay does not intend to portray the said lack of homogeneity or clarity in WID and GAD as an impediment. In fact, contextual agility and diversity of a policy idea is at times a positive boon, demands for clarity and homogeneity can sometimes be oppressive and hegemonic. Nonetheless, I wish to present examples of how in different contexts, opportunistic and cynical uses and abuses of WID, and to a lesser extent GAD - has compounded the very injustices and injuries they were designed to mitigate.

Framing WID and GAD within the Feminist Paradigm of Development, Assumptions and Pitfalls.

One cannot successfully approach the WID vs GAD debate, and the critique and the discourse surrounding the two different approaches, without first understanding their ideological grounding within the feminist paradigm of development.

Political, economic and cultural feminism - in the abstract sense, arguably long precedes developmentalism, or even modern First Wave Feminism in the west.

The role of women in the local economy, nation building, politics, at war, in rebellion, in artistry and science for the most part, lies hidden in a masculine account of our collective history. Furthermore, narratives of womanhood in the periphery - even in relatively modern academic inquiries, is subsumed by the hegemony of the imperialistic core.

Therefore, in studying and critiquing WID and GAD, due reverence must be paid to these subsumed histories and narratives to avoid a few common pitfalls.

The first pitfall to avoid in the discourse of development is to frame the 'woman', particularly the woman in the global south, as a homogenised icon of the victimised and subdued, 'held back' from any 'real' economic, political or developmental contribution, rather than acknowledging that the very real, crucial contributions women make in development is seldom adequately captured and recognised. The inability of WID to capture these contributions comprehensively is a critique that will be revisited in later in the essay.

The second pitfall, is to dissect the distributive and the recognitive injuries perpetuated unto women, in a vacuum that excludes, wholly or partially - the role of men; a Women in Development approach therefore is arguably less sociologically robust than a Gender and Development approach due to its lack of a relational dialectic between roles, relationships

and interactions that shape femininity in relation to its contextual masculine counterpart (and vice versa) - a point that will be elaborated later in the essay.

Having mentioned the words femininity and masculinity; Reflexively, the third pitfall maybe one's own definitions of the feminine and the masculine, which risk being traditional, archaic and informed as well as restricted by patriarchal overtones. Truly inclusive development must acknowledge that individuals, in nature and in aspiration; transcend the biological categorisation of their physical selves. I give particular attention to this with the view to suggest later in the essay that compared to GAD, WID only provides a very restricted window to discover within development contexts, the true diversity and the variegations within womanhood itself.

A comparative critique of WID and GAD

WID and GAD in light of Economic and Cultural Hegemony.

This point has to be established in light of two major critiques of the ideological origin of WID and the assumptions behind them. Firstly, the gauging and the recognition of Female contribution to development in WID were almost entirely based on *economic merit* and *productive value*. Secondly - the power to determine the nature of said *economic merit* and *productive value* resided entirely within the hegemony of the western neoliberal project.

As portrayed in the 1973 Percy Amendment to the US foreign Assistance; "Assistance granted by the United States was seen as **required** to help **integrate** women into the national economies of **foreign** countries, thus improving their status and assisting the total development efforts" (cited in Tinker, 1990, Italics for emphasis added for the purpose of this essay).

The passage above makes two assumptions, the first being that women were *currently not integrated* to the national economy, the second being that if they were to be integrated, they

would *require 'assistance'* - and the conditionalities of this assistance meant that women's integration to the national economies of the periphery had to be subjected to certain terms and conditions of the core, which in part, came in form of Structural Adjustment Programmes.

We know now, that women as a group were among those most affected by Structural Adjustment Programmes. The forced deprecation of traditional economic milieu, rolling back the state, along with defunding or underfunding indigenously developed women-oriented protections, deregulation of labour and environmental protections and decimating publicly owned enterprises enlarged the cleavages of inequality, of which the undeniable and acute differential impact on women is documented in extensive detail (Refer to; Peet and Hartwick 2009, and Joseph Stiglitz)

To say the least then, the WID aspirations of distributive justice and equity for women have not been consistent with, or have been consistently violated by the global economic ambitions of donor nations. On the other hand, WID projects and programmes have not been able to successfully contribute towards mitigation of said distributive injuries.

In comparison, theoretically, GAD, which emerges in part as a reaction to aforementioned failures of WID, goes further in questioning the underlying social, economic and political structures of subordination (Rathgeber 1990). By problematizing the link between gender and economy in a less deterministic way, (Pearson 1981) it leaves practitioners and policymakers alike with improved room to manoeuvre by incorporating a diverse array of sociological intricacies rooted in racial stratification, class, conflict, women's reproductive roles, household politics and different forms of oppression.

But in practice, realistically, does GAD unlike WID escape hegemonic impositions of societal and economic aspirations from the core to the periphery? Who has the power to define subordination? who has the power to distinguish between subordination and

empathetic altruism? who has the cultural and academic legitimacy over the epistemological lenses that are used to analyse the relationships between men and women? Who defines the aspirations of freedom, equality and womanhood?

While the principle criticism of WID is its tendency to place women in an isolated analytical category, GAD cannot be exempted from moments of ideological exclusion. Primarily, the GAD drive to explain the nature of injustices through subordination induces a kind of myopia, which tends to emphasise on conflict and differences, whilst underplaying the importance of togetherness, bonds and similarities in household life. They both operate under conditions of hegemony, and this often creates and perpetuates recognitive injuries, explained in the following section.

Does a Women in Development approach perpetuate recognitive injuries? Can GAD mitigate this?

Returning to an earlier reference to uses and abuses of WID, I wish to present an example as to how a WID approach in local policy and practice - can cement, rather than dismantle, recognitive injuries that subjugate women and reify the imposition of oppressive norms, identities and roles unto women.

Bangladesh, Ghana, India and Sri Lanka, (this list is by no means exhaustive) since the early 70's to mid 80's, saw - with the aid and patronage of international organisations and donors - a proliferation of ministries, programmes and institutions which embodied a WID approach that sought to improve the *material* conditions of women.

While this essay does not provide room to fully explore the effectiveness of these organisations, and also generally admitting that these institutions has had a recognisable *distributive* impact women's lives, let us take a cursory glance at the official titles these institutions share;

Bangladesh : Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs (Estd. 1972)

Sri Lanka : Ministry of Women and Child Affairs (Estd. 1978)

India : Ministry of Women and Child Development (Estd. 1985)

Ghana : Ministry of Women's and Children's Affairs (Estd. 2001)

Is it not fascinating, the seemingly natural and seamless manner in which these institutions situate women and children in the same developmental category? The usual justifications invoke maternal health, infant mortality and childhood nourishment, as if to say that the male counterpart, as instrumental to reproduction as the female, is exempted from the responsibility, or is excluded from the physiological and psychological labour of pre and post-natal care.

In fact, the recognitive injury is far more severe; These are snapshots of unintentional *honesty* in institutional manifestations of oppressive cultural structures, that feel empowered by WID's desire to ringfence women into an exclusive category, a category which also naturally provides a convenient container into which not only women, but also the pre-existing roles associated with them can be placed. In the long run, these containers reify the idea that women, (much like children in this instance) is a category that befits infantilization, requires guardianship, and has, or ought to have limited autonomy.

One hopes, Gender and Development would theoretically enable the dismantling of said strict, binary categories by introducing a sense of fluidity and a relational dialectic that makes its implementation less susceptible to recognitive abuse. However, in reality - whilst dismantling one form of misrecognition, it perpetuates another.

To understand the nature of this misrecognition, one must also acknowledge that in reality the application of GAD is still largely gynocentric. Most programmes, policies and projects see it as their liberty to use *gender*, as

both a substitution and a placeholder for *women*. (McIlwaine & Datta, 2003)

And the aforementioned gynocentrism, particularly when imposed by the North and poorly translated by developmental agents of the South - has unfortunate implications.

Firstly - it subconsciously internalises an image of the northern female as **the** women in her *quintessentially liberated form*. (Oyèrónké Oyèwùmí identifies and dismantles this perceived universality of Western concepts in her 1997 work, 'The invention of Women') Secondly, it reduces gender interaction (mostly household politics) to a two dimensional, often sensationalist portrayal of the oppressor and oppressed (Singh 2007). Thirdly, it perversely misinterprets moments of voluntary, empathetic altruism as *internalised oppression*. Finally, much like WID, GAD *also* homogenises these assumptions and aspirations throughout the global South. This process reduces the variegated identities of southern women to a singular, two dimensional, reductionist image of an oppressed '*other*' of developmental focus, rendering them perpetually subaltern to exercise their independent voice, opinion and terms of engagement. Therefore, the question to what degree GAD, in practice is able to mitigate recognitive injuries commonly associated with WID makes for a pertinent criticism.

GAD's Institutional Isomorphism and the wearing of the Radical edge

The principal institutional limitation of WID was that it created a compartmentalised sector within governance to address *women specific issues* - a specificity which was framed without taking into consideration that political or developmental decisions that women are affected by are holistic and intersectional and therefore cannot be addressed in the capacity of one sector or ministry. As such, WID has remained marginal to the mainstream development policy of governments (Levy 1991), with policies translating to reality in an

ad-hoc way, often via drastically underfunded programs (Levy 1996).

The concern is that like anything which emerges with a radical spirit and slowly deteriorates into mechanistic formality overtime, whether GAD, rather than integrating the ideals of gender equality intersectionally, intersectorally and holistically within governance and development practice would instead replace WID within its pre-existing sectoral boundaries. If in practice, GAD is merely substituted for WID, it would negate its most fundamental rationale.

Concluding notes

Having presented a comparative critique of WID and GAD, this essay holds the view that in comparison to WID, GAD presents a more holistic and comprehensive approach to framing subordination.

However, it emphasises GAD's own limitations, both in ideology and practice, and the tendency for GAD to merely be an institutional replacement to WID rather than engender a radical, emancipatory shift in developmental discourse.

Emergent theory, such as Women, Environment and Development (WED) and Postmodernism and Development (PAD) are symptomatic of how concepts of gender equity and parity require multidisciplinary attention as well as constant multidisciplinary innovation. Developmental parity and civil liberties of gender as well as sexual minorities hinge upon constant innovation within radical gender discourse as well as development policy.

The debate that *must be had* on how effectively a dynamic, fluid, non-binary notion of gender can be captured within development will require extensive contribution from postmodern feminist theory as well as movements for civil liberties.

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