





GENDER AND DEVELOPMENT

6

INTRODUCTION

The 1970s saw the resurgence of an international women's movement—itsself nurtured by diverse women's struggles in many countries—converging around the International Women's Year (1975) and the activities of the United Nations Decade for Women (1976–1985). It took time, however, for “gender” to become a priority of the international development community and donor agencies. This affected the Institute's ability to mobilize funding for research on gender issues, although several projects contained components that examined the situation of women. In the early 1990s gender became a major area of work, with a number of projects that addressed the themes of governance and livelihoods.

GENDER POLITICS

Throughout its research, UNRISD has sought to highlight the ways in which gender power relations and inequalities are constantly embedded, challenged and re-embedded across manifold institutional arenas, from the household to the national and global marketplace, from community-based organizations and social movements to public administration, national legislatures and international organizations.

The 1970s and 1980s saw a resurgence of interest in the “hidden histories” of female activism worldwide, contesting the view that women were passive bystanders in the making of history. Ironically, women's absence from mainstream historiography seemed to be replicated in the literature on popular movements, which, by and large, had very little to say about the political activism of the great majority of women, especially those at the grassroots level.

Women's activism

It was within this context that the UNRISD project on Popular Participation (see chapter 5) set out to explore women's participation in collective action and social movements in selected Latin American and Asian countries.

The case studies included women's mobilization to denounce human rights violations; their

participation in neighbourhood associations, communal kitchens, mothers' clubs and the like to make demands for state provision of urban services and to defend living standards; as well as attempts by women activists in trade unions, peasant organizations and indigenous movements to set up autonomous bodies where women's specific interests—routinely sidelined in the mainstream organizations or movements—could be expressed and debated (Jelin 1990; Omvedt 1986). While in some instances the protagonists themselves defined their collective action as “feminist”, thereby overtly challenging women's subordination, in others women were encouraged to participate by an appeal to their identity as wife/housewife/mother, with the stated objective of defending their families' and communities' standard of living.

In all cases, women's action and goals constituted a new way of relating what is “political” to what is “social”. By encouraging public debate on issues traditionally associated with the private or social sphere—such as matrimonial tutelage, domestic violence, reproductive rights and non-market-based social reproduction—women's activism was shifting the boundaries of issues considered to be public and political.

But was this “new” activism—some of it in apparent compliance with the traditional gender order—able to unsettle deep-seated gender hierarchies and erode women's subordination? According to

oral testimonies documented by the researchers, many of the women who participated in communal kitchens or neighbourhood associations (activities that were seen as extensions of their domestic role) saw participation and learning as the antithesis of their isolation at home. In some instances women's mobilization around their practical interests seemed to have triggered transformative processes that challenged some of the structures of gender inequality. But such outcomes were far from guaranteed. They were highly contingent on the changes in power relations and political discourse that were taking place in these collective struggles. Many of the questions raised in these early studies resurfaced again, more than a decade later, in the context of neoliberal social sector restructuring, when women's organizations and NGOs were increasingly drawn into the contentious role of welfare delivery that the state was no longer willing and/or able to assume.

Gender mainstreaming

Drawing inspiration from women's popular struggles to change male-dominated organizations, by the mid-1980s national women's movements were increasingly directing their attention to key public institutions that shape women's lives. Feminist interest in transforming state processes and institutions was further legitimized through the activities of the United Nations system. The demand for policy to address women's needs in

development was often framed in terms of a project of access—integration into a range of policy-making and policy-implementing institutions, more widely known as gender mainstreaming. The most important of these institutions has been, and continues to be, the state, although over the past two decades its role has been seriously questioned and its capacity to govern eroded (see chapters 2 and 5).

Transitions from authoritarian rule provided valuable opportunities for some sections of the women's movement to try to influence policy formulation and implementation.

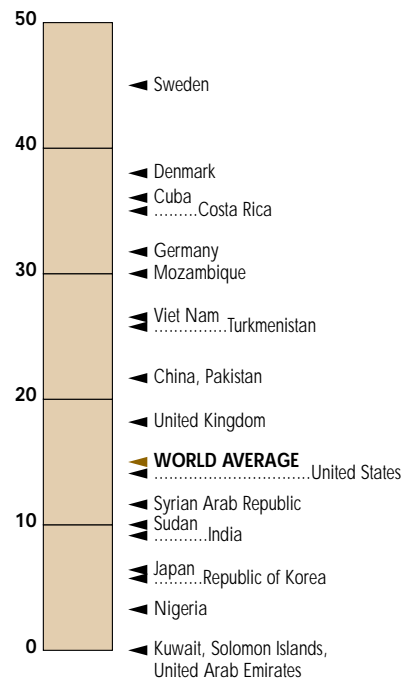
One way they did so was by setting up specialized “women’s machineries”, whether in the form of women’s departments, ministries or bureaux, within public administration. A six-country comparative study of women’s machineries undertaken by UNRISD in 1993–1994, under the project Technical Co-operation and Women’s Lives: Integrating Gender into Development Policy, confirmed the importance of changes in political regime for institutionalizing gender concerns within the state (Goetz 1995). Women’s machineries, however, routinely suffered from a number of shortcomings. Chronic understaffing, lack of resources, limited impact, uncertain mandate, state personnel’s lack of awareness of—and commitment to—gender issues, and lack of legitimacy that gender equality appeared to have within



public administration all hindered their work. One policy area that remained particularly resistant to feminist incursions was macroeconomic decision making. Similar constraints were highlighted in the multilateral organizations that were examined by UNRISD (Razavi and Miller 1995b).

If gender policy advocacy is to become embedded within the state bureaucracy, it needs to be bolstered by an effective political base outside the state. But it has proved difficult to establish, or exploit, an iterative relationship between women's units in public administration and women's constituencies in civil society. Given the history of co-optation of women's groups by dominant political parties and the state, and the visibility of wives or female relatives of national leaders in high political positions, some women's groups are wary of party-linked women's machineries and mainstream politics. And this reluctance to become too closely associated with women's machineries makes strategic collaboration difficult (Miller and Razavi 1998).

**FIGURE 6.1
WOMEN IN NATIONAL
PARLIAMENTS**



■ The percentage of seats held by women in the lower or single house in selected countries, and the world average.

Source: IPU 2003.

GENDER JUSTICE AND RIGHTS

Strategies of gender mainstreaming have been part of a broader attempt by gender advocates to democratize policy institutions by making them more accountable to women citizens. These efforts have coincided with other shifts in the international policy agenda since the 1990s, which have underlined democracy and rights-based development. In this policy climate, women's movements have found governments and legislatures more responsive to some of their demands. A wide range of countries have implemented laws that recognize women's rights in critical areas such as divorce, child custody, domestic violence and reproductive rights. Yet success in raising these controversial issues, and maybe even legislating on them, has not been matched by an improvement in quality of life for the majority of women.

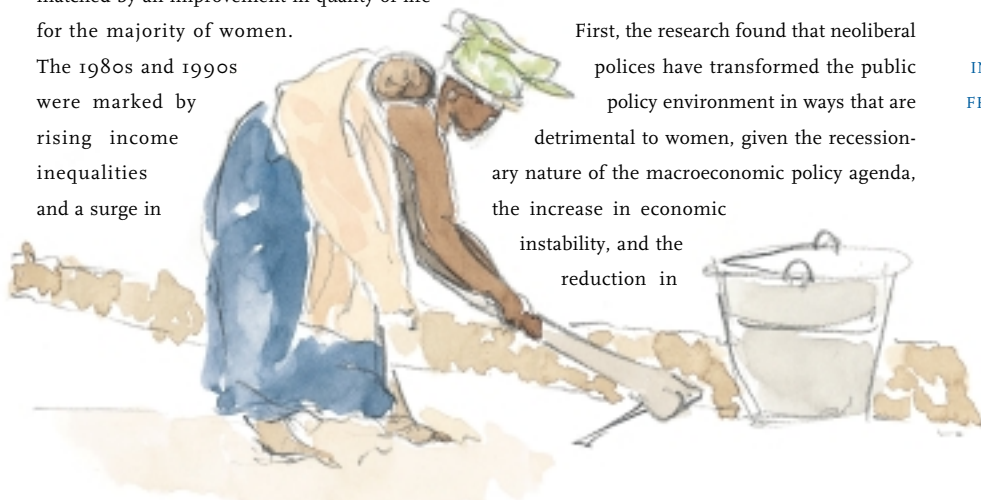
The 1980s and 1990s were marked by rising income inequalities and a surge in

poverty, while the role of the state in the provision and delivery of welfare was seriously questioned and undermined.

As part of its contribution to Beijing+5, UNRISD reflected on the ambivalent record of the 1990s, and on the significance that has been given in international development policy to rights and democracy (Molyneux and Razavi 2002). Research examined three sets of issues: the tensions between neoliberal economic and social policies, and women's substantive enjoyment of human rights; the extent to which states and movements that claim to be democratic have facilitated women's presence in politics and been responsive to their voiced concerns; and the tensions between cultural (and identity) politics and the agenda for gender equality. A number of conclusions emerged from this work.

First, the research found that neoliberal policies have transformed the public policy environment in ways that are detrimental to women, given the recessionary nature of the macroeconomic policy agenda, the increase in economic instability, and the reduction in

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the capacity of the state to raise resources for redistribution and social protection. Second, while women have become an important political force in many countries, their political participation is not sufficiently institutionalized and entrenched. Where the capacity of women in civil society to act as a constituency holding the dominant state/party to account has been weak and where women's political inclusion has been extended as a favour (rather than a right) by states/parties with weak internal democracy, gender advocates have not been able to put forward programmes for radical change. Third, the case for minority cultural rights (or group rights) has been made forcefully in recent years, and laws have been put in place to give substance to such rights (see box 6.1). But there is always the danger that cultural claims will be framed by a monolithic understanding of culture that overstates internal consensus. Such understandings often misrepresent social customs that underpin male dominance as practices that "the society" wants to sustain. The best protection against this lies in the mobilization of alternative voices, which can suggest more nuanced interpretations of the interface and tensions between cultural and sexual equality, and may well modify the understanding of both (Mohamad 2002; Phillips 2002; Tripp 2002).

GENDER AND LIVELIHOODS

To what extent have advances in women's participation and rights, and women's emergence as a visible political force over the past three decades, been translated into improved well-being and more secure livelihoods? Various UNRISD projects have examined the impact of development processes and policies on women, notably in relation to agrarian change and export-oriented manufacturing. Work on the roles and conditions of women has also formed part of other UNRISD programmes on, for example, refugees and the environment (see chapters 3 and 4).

Gender and agrarian change

In the late 1970s, research commenced on the Impact on Women of Socioeconomic Changes (Palmer and von Buchwald 1978). Financial constraints limited this research to West Africa, but fieldwork carried out in Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire and Senegal gave rise to important findings. Agricultural modernization and commercialization were changing the gender division of labour in fundamental ways, but rarely in a manner that benefited women. Rural women were under pressure to intensify their workloads on family farms where cash crops were grown, which was reducing the time they could allocate to their independent farming. This diminished the

Box 6.1—Indigenous women's struggle for justice in Chiapas, Mexico

Following persistent pressure by social movements both domestically and abroad, the Mexican constitution was amended in 1992 to recognize the multicultural composition of the nation. This was considered by many as a victory for the Mexican Indian movement, and as a step toward a new relationship between indigenous peoples and the nation-state. But this apparent shift to official acceptance of multiculturalism has not been free of contradictions. In some cases, pro-indigenous legislation—recognizing the rights of indigenous people to their own norms and practices—has actually worked to the disadvantage of weak and marginalized groups within indigenous communities. For example, customary law in Mexico, with few exceptions, does not recognize women's rights to land, while customary political institutions exclude women along with religious minorities from holding political office. Men are allowed to “discipline” their wives and children through beating; and acts of violence against women, even if these result in death, can be condoned. How, then, can cultural claims and rights be reconciled with women's human rights?

The numerous conflicts over women's rights and customary law in regard to domestic violence, bride abduction and rape

are not surprising. In particular, indigenous women now face the dual task of defending their rights to their own cultures vis-à-vis the Mexican state, while at the same time questioning essentialist and static conceptions of culture and tradition within the Indian movement that have negative implications for the full realization of women's rights.

In Chiapas, the Zapatista National Liberation Army, popularly known as the Zapatistas, has attempted to reconcile women's human rights and indigenous cultural rights. The Zapatistas advocate forms of conflict resolution that draw on both national and international law. They also forcefully promote “new traditions” in which women are more actively—and more equally—present. The statements made by indigenous women during workshops and interviews, together with the documents of various congresses and encounters since the Zapatista uprising, paint a picture of culture that is changing and dynamic. An important sector of indigenous women, led by Zapatista militants, has chosen to fight on various fronts. They are lobbying to reform the constitution so that the right of indigenous peoples to autonomy is recognized and, at the same time, they are fighting for an inclusive gender perspective as part of autonomy projects. Their attempts aim to reinvent tradition on the basis of a culture of equity and justice.

Source: Hernández Castillo 2002.

productivity of women's farms, with detrimental impacts on the amount of produce that women could use for self-provisioning and/or sale (Savané 1986).

In contrast to much of the women in development (WID) literature of the period—which failed to question the unfavourable terms on which women were integrated into the development process—this early UNRISD study was informed by analysis of the economic forces unleashed by national and global policies. The unequal gender relations in the African countryside were being reproduced and reinforced through economic policy that prioritized the commercialization of agriculture and the intensified production of primary commodities for the global market.

The gender content of agrarian change received renewed attention from UNRISD in the early 1990s with the launch of a new research project, *Technical Co-operation and Women's Lives: Integrating Gender into Development Policy*, exclusively focused on the gender dimensions of development (Razavi and Miller 1995a). One of the research components examined how economic restructuring in the agrarian context was impacting on livelihoods in gendered ways, in Asia and sub-Saharan Africa. The research in Viet Nam explored the ways in which gender was mediating the links between livelihood diversification and the government's dual objectives of reducing poverty and enhancing growth, while

in Uganda, the promotion of non-traditional agricultural export crops, a keystone of the country's macroeconomic strategy, received close scrutiny (Kabeer and Van Anh 2000; Kasente et al. 2000).

Agricultural liberalization—one of the main tenets of structural adjustment programmes—had very different meanings and outcomes in these two societal settings. It carried different risks, both in terms of food security and as far as the intensification of women's unpaid work was concerned.

Gender relations were crucial in explaining the disadvantages women faced. They had overwhelming responsibility for household reproduction, and gender-specific constraints affected women's access to resources and opportunities.

These findings were echoed by the Institute's analysis of poverty from a gender perspective, which drew attention to the way gender identities shape women's access to material and other resources, and their varied responses to opportunities and constraints. In addition to comparing outcomes in terms of well-being for men and women, poverty analyses need to focus on the processes of impoverishment behind these outcomes, because this is the level at which the links between gender and poverty can be more meaningfully established (Razavi 1999b).

At a time when increasing emphasis was being placed on secure property rights, through gender-equitable land titling, as a solution to women's unequal access to land and as a cure for female poverty, UNRISD drew attention to the fact that women's access to land was being shaped by very different forces, mechanisms and institutional histories, and that it was not always helpful to see the constraints on women's farming in terms of their impeded access to land (Razavi 2003). Neither was it helpful to extend policy prescriptions from one developing country context to another. The project Agrarian Change, Gender and Land Rights revealed, for example, that in many parts of sub-Saharan Africa it is not lack of access to land that constrains women smallholders, even though this is the factor that is often highlighted. What women smallholders seem to lack in many of these contexts are the resources to work the land, and the institutional and infrastructural support that would enable them to market their agricultural products (Whitehead and Tsikata 2003).

UNRISD research in Uzbekistan documented the increase in women's demands for land in a context where non-agricultural occupations in teaching, health services and rural industries—which provided significant employment opportunities for rural women—have virtually collapsed, and the rural population has fallen back on household and subsidiary plots

for self-subsistence. Women's land hunger thus seems to encapsulate both a wish to reinstate the terms of their former social contract with collective enterprises (which included access to subsidiary plots), and their despair in the face of limited alternatives (Kandiyoti 2003).

Research in Brazil, South Africa and Tanzania revealed that women's interests in land became politicized in the 1990s (Deere 2003; Walker 2003; Tsikata 2003). But even though democratic openings have revitalized the national debate on agrarian reform and provided greater voice to women's advocates, the absence of a proactive



role by the state does not bode well for women. In South Africa the government's insistence on a demand-driven programme of land reform has hindered its ability to reach rural women. Nor is there reason to believe that in such a climate processes of devolution and decentralization, which are often recommended as ways of democratizing land tenure institutions and/or developing efficient land markets, will necessarily enhance gender equity and justice in access to resources. These trends raise warning flags about power configurations at the local level, and the political and institutional obstacles to ensuring greater equity in access to resources, including land (Whitehead and Tsikata 2003).

Feminization of export-oriented manufacturing

A contentious trend over the past two decades has been the emergence of women as the predominant labour force in the export-oriented manufacturing industries of the developing world. Free-trade enthusiasts argue that women in developing countries were previously victims of labour market "distortions" (that is, pro-labour regulations), that they have benefited under more "flexible" labour markets, and that they are poised to emerge as "winners" of globalization if only developing country governments would fully liberalize their external trade.

There is also a significant amount of micro-level feminist research that documents the empowering implications of women's paid work. Young women working in export-oriented factories often voice a preference for this work, compared to the alternatives (such as domestic work and unpaid work in family agriculture). The fact that women are able to earn a wage has given some of them a tool with which to contest parental and patriarchal control over their lives. Yet these favourable views also have their vocal critics, who present scenarios depicting women sweatshop factory workers in global production chains, along with child labourers, as victims of neoliberal globalization. In recent years UNRISD has carried out extensive research in this area (Miller and Vivian 2002; Razavi 1999a; Pearson et al. forthcoming). The emerging evidence provides a picture that is more nuanced and complex than is often portrayed in these polarized debates (see box 6.2).

One of the critical issues emerging from this evidence is that women's responses to the wage contract may be different in some respects from men's. It is essential to recognize the trade-off that women may make between low wages (and poor working conditions) and the fact that these reduce their dependency and subordination in family and marital contexts.

The other critical issue is that the increase in women's participation in the global economy

Box 6.2—Export-oriented employment for women

By the mid-1990s, there was a growing consensus that growth in international trade in manufacturing is, on the whole, favourable to women's participation in the paid labour force.

Yet the picture is not uniformly positive.

- > Factory work is often detrimental to women's health, due to the use of carcinogenic substances and long working hours. The work tends to be repetitive, monotonous and fast, leaving young workers prematurely "burned out".
- > Women workers occupy the lowest rungs in both garment and electronics manufacturing. They are very often recruited as unskilled workers, given scant training and offered limited promotion prospects.

Furthermore, at the macro level, a number of more recent trends raise questions about the sustainability of the export-oriented strategy.

- > Employment patterns in some subsectors of export-oriented manufacturing have been de-feminized as export production has become more skill- and capital-intensive.
- > Those countries that accelerated their production of manufactured goods for export faced diminishing terms of trade between 1985 and 1995.
- > As cheap imports have replaced domestically manufactured goods, employment opportunities for women in the manufacturing sector have declined.

Source: Miller and Vivian 2002; Pearson et al. forthcoming.

has coincided with a deregulation of working conditions and work-related entitlements. This seriously challenges the view that increased participation in global markets brings women into a situation where their economic rights can be exercised and entitlements accessed through labour market activity. In countries as diverse as Chile and Poland, the retreat from universalist principles of social provision, together with the privatization of social security, have dealt a heavy blow to women's entitlements. In systems where benefits are calculated on the basis of labour

market contributions, women tend to be at a disadvantage: their incomes are generally lower and their employment histories shorter and more interrupted than men's, given their unpaid care work (to which no market value is attached). Market-based entitlements are thus inherently male-biased.

Democratic forms of social regulation, enforced by states, can make markets less risky and enhance social solidarity. Regulations, however, very often reflect the balance of political forces

in society. Social insurance models that provide benefits to those in the formal labour market do not directly discriminate against women, yet such models indirectly place many at a disadvantage—revealing what has been identified as a “male bias” in social policy. Women’s interests can be better served through forms of regulation that value women’s *different* contributions and needs, rather than forms that do not differentiate between male and female citizens. The extent to which social policies serve women’s interests involve political decisions that depend on the strength of women’s claims for justice, as well as the dominant analytical and institutional frameworks informing public debate and policy choices. Some of these issues are now being researched under the new UNRISD project on Gender and Social Policy (see box 2.3).

What UNRISD research on gender dimensions of development has clearly shown is that advances in women’s political participation have taken place alongside the consolidation of a market-led development model that denies vast groups of women the opportunity to claim entitlements and achieve more secure livelihoods. The period of liberal ascendancy has been associated with some limited advances in women’s formal rights, but without an enabling policy environment that can make these rights meaningful or substantive (Molyneux and Razavi 2002). Research has also shown that the achievement of gender equality cannot rest on law alone,

but requires a multidimensional approach to develop appropriate policies, both social and economic, as well as the democratic institutions and processes that enable women’s needs to be voiced and heard.