When we look back at 20 years of studies on the roles, contributions, and needs of women, the question emerges: What has been learned from all of this activity as we begin a new decade?

In 1991, it is known that women in developing countries work longer hours, earn less money, have greater responsibilities, are less literate, and have lower caloric intake in proportion to body weight than men. In situations where everyone must work long hours to secure sufficient income for basic needs, women must work even longer. They are faced not only with the necessity of contributing to household income but also with the responsibility for all or most of the reproductive labour, including bearing and caring for children, preparing of food, looking after the elderly, nursing the sick, and the multitude of other tasks that are labelled "women's work" in most parts of the world.

Much of this has been brought to public awareness through research and the increasing influence of local and national women activist groups. But what has really been accomplished? Are we better prepared and equipped today to integrate women into development strategies? Has the active participation of developing-country feminists changed the focus of development initiatives for women?

Women's groups in different parts of the world are struggling with the answers to these and other questions. Some of the key issues in gender and development include economic opportunity and equality, women's legal rights, social participation, and the relationship of women to the environment. It must be recognized, of course, that regional and national priorities and customs vary and that the approaches taken to some of the same problems are markedly different. Nevertheless, some general strains of importance can be acknowledged.

**Economic Position of Women**

The impact of the global debt crisis and structural adjustment policies on the condition and status of women has received increasing attention. It has been argued that women have suffered disproportionately from the debt crisis and adjustment policies, not only as producers or workers in formal-sector employment but also as reproducers who have been forced to provide, on a private basis, social services previously provided by the state.

Caribbean feminist researchers have been particularly active in addressing this issue. Economic participation and women's economic survival strategies have been significant recurring themes in their work. High levels of female-headed households, combined with male unemployment and migration and relatively high female education participation rates, have led to a substantial integration of women into Caribbean labour markets, although mostly at poorly remunerated levels and frequently within the informal sector. In the face of economic crisis, Caribbean women have been vulnerable not only as principal family income earners but also as household managers who have had to provide for basic family needs with seriously reduced resources.

Several Caribbean projects currently being supported by IDRC examine these issues (see page 13).

Latin American researchers have focused on the impact of the debt crisis on women's participation in formal labour markets. Research in Brazil has shown that women have been integrated into formal labour markets at lower salary rates and with little job security. During the economic boom period of the early 1970s, large numbers of Brazilian women entered formal employment through the industrial sector. However, this was accompanied by a marked wage discrimination by gender with women commonly working similar hours but earning substantially smaller salaries than men.

In Africa, there also emerged a strong feminist critique of the structural adjustment policies imposed by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. Research showed that women tended to be concentrated in the lowest levels of public sector employment, where layoffs were most...
Profound. Consumption patterns shifted to cheaper basic staples that required longer preparation time, again immediately affecting women's work. Health services were cut back and women were denied care for themselves and asked to assume greater responsibility for the care of others. This became of increasing importance in the AIDS crisis of the 1980s when many families were forced to take care of victims of the disease.

During the 1980s, there continued to be a great deal of research on women's role in agriculture, on women's informal-sector employment, and, increasingly, on women's entrepreneurship. Researchers in different regions pointed to the handicaps faced by women in attempting to obtain credit, in getting access to new agricultural technologies, in reconciling productive with reproductive responsibilities, and in coping with the immediate microimpact of the global economic crisis. There also was a growing awareness among feminist researchers of the need to influence national policymakers to improve the working conditions of women.

In general, the approach taken by feminist researchers differed from that of traditional economic researchers insofar as they focused specifically on the impact of structural adjustment policies on women. They attempted to assign economic value to the extra burden and stress imposed on women as a result of macroeconomic policy measures. "Engendering Adjustment for the 1990s," a report of a Commonwealth Expert Group published early in 1990, provides an excellent overview of the impact of such policies in Commonwealth countries.

Women's Rights

In many regions, women continued to suffer from legal discrimination in the 1980s, either because laws had not been modernized to give them equal rights or because equal rights laws were not applied. This is particularly true with respect to land rights but, discrimination occurred on many other levels, including employment, wages, and pension benefits. In other cases, women have been denied basic human and political rights and virtually everywhere continue to suffer from domestic violence. This is usually not recognized by local authorities as a serious, punishable crime.

In Africa, land tenure continues to be an issue of frequent legal contention (see page 10). IDRC projects in Ghana, Nigeria, Senegal, Cote d'Ivoire, Tanzania, and Kenya are examining land tenure systems and women's access to land ownership. The researchers are studying the extent to which the legal and cultural constraints placed on women's farming capacities hamper their ability to make effective contributions to agricultural production. These studies are underscoring the relationship between women's access to land and food security.

During the past decade, there has emerged in Asia a strong concern with the gap between women's legal rights as stated in statutory laws and the actual implementation of those rights. An IDRC project in northeastern Thailand is examining the contradictions among statutory laws, customary laws, and village practices. Preliminary findings suggest that village women continue to be discouraged from participating in decision-making processes by virtue of their own tradition-based reticence and the continuing observation of customary laws, despite the existence of statutory laws giving them full political rights. A comparative project based in China and India is examining women's access to land tenure within differing social, political, and economic contexts. Early findings suggest that Chinese women are particularly vulnerable with respect to land rights.

In Latin America, feminist scholars focused attention on political and human rights, especially in the context of the authoritarian regimes present in the region at the beginning of the decade. Probably the best known example is that of the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo in Buenos Aires who weekly circled around the plaza in protest against the disappearance of their children.

Social Participation

The social and cultural position of women continued to be of interest to feminist researchers during the 1980s. Despite some regional variances, most feminist researchers were exploring...
the basis of women's subordinate cultural position and examining women's efforts to improve their own status. In Latin America, there was interest in the changing power relations between men and women emerging from increased urbanization and greater absorption of women into formal labour markets.

A project in Chile has examined the portrayal of women in the media and is measuring the extent to which women's self-images are influenced by the standard stereotypes in popular soap operas. Considerable emphasis is being placed on the conflicts between women's societal roles, the official ideology of the state with respect to women and gender roles, and the systematic devaluing of women's self-image through an essentially negative or patronizing media portrayal.

In Asia, cultural and religious definitions of gender roles remained of compelling concern. Changes in gender roles over time also have been analyzed. Indian scholars have shown that, historically, there existed a strong matriarchal tradition that has eroded with the emergence of powerful patriarchal economic interests. In the Philippines, research has focused on gender inequality, class domination, and the predominance of foreign over national interests. Other social participation issues receiving attention in Asia include decision-making and work patterns within the household, the conceptualization of the value of work, and competition in social relations among women. In some countries, there has also been a growing commitment to the study of prostitution and the commoditization of women.

Environment

It became increasingly evident during the decade that men and women have different attitudes toward the environment and natural resource utilization with respect to expectations, needs, and motivations. Although this has been recognized by various researchers and by environmental activist groups, there has been little systematic information-gathering on how women interact with environment and natural resources.

Nonetheless, in Africa there has emerged a growing concern with environmental degradation and with the necessity to regain control of rapidly eroding natural resources. African feminists have drawn attention to the close relationship of African women with natural resources, to their utilization patterns, and to the immediacy of the impact of desertification and deforestation on women's work and livelihood.
A higher level of education is permitting women in the South to contribute to more areas of research.

Several current IDRC projects address these issues. WEDNET, the Women, Environment and Development Network, was established in January 1989 to support research on the identification and legitimization of grass-roots African women's knowledge about the environment. The WEDNET projects, currently underway in anglophone and francophone Africa, focus on indigenous women's knowledge concerning management of water, forestry, and crop systems. They attempt to examine the knowledge already held by African women and avoid the more usual tendency to dismiss traditional knowledge systems.

The relationship between gender and environment also has emerged as a concern in some Asian contexts. For example, an ongoing IDRC project in India is examining the impact of environmentally damaging strip mining operations on women's farming practices in a remote mountainous region. Researchers have found marked differences in the attitudes of men and women toward the development of mining operations. Women tend to take a longer term view, measuring the cost of environmental destruction and loss of agricultural lands against the short-term benefits of male employment.

Toward a New Vision of the Future

A refreshing trend in the 1980s was the significant proportion of "women in development" research being carried out by Third World women themselves rather than visiting researchers from the North. A key development in this area was the use of participatory research methodologies designed to break down and eliminate the traditional divisions between researchers and the subjects of research. "Action research" has also become more prominent. Frequently, such research has been undertaken by NGOs or women's groups with limited research experience. A good example of this can be found in the work of SPARC, an Indian NGO based in Bombay committed to improving the living standards of pavement dwellers (see page 8). In essence, such groups have "learned by doing" and in the process have developed new insights into women's life experiences and feminist scholarship.

In the 1980s, feminist researchers collected voluminous information about the conditions, perceptions, and needs of women. They began to organize this information into specific understandings about the social relations of gender in different parts of the world. Women organized themselves more effectively than ever before, and their voices were heard in social movements around the globe. The NGO Forum at the End-of-the-U.N. Decade for Women at Nairobi in 1985 was a celebration of women's growing strength and solidarity. In the 1980s, women moved closer toward self-empowerment.

But feminist researchers and activists must work toward greater progress. In my view, a feminist vision for the future must be based on the more coherent articulation of what we already know. Our task during the 90s, as female and male feminists, must be to bring our experience, knowledge, and values into the mainstream of global decision-making. We must be both researchers and activists and we must point in the direction of a more equitable sharing of the world's dwindling resources. It is a daunting challenge for the 1990s. But it is one that must be faced.

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This article is an abridged version of "Integrating Gender into Development: Research and Action Agendas for the 1990s" by Eva Rathgeber.