

Working Group Discussion paper: Social/Gender Analysis

Brief overview of current situation of gender analysis and questions for discussion, by

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Current situation

In 1970, Ester Boserup, a Danish economist, wrote a book (*Women's Role in Economic Development*) showing that women's work had been ignored or underestimated by development planners during the two previous decades. The book rapidly became a classic and thousands and thousands of research projects and publications have been done during the last 30 years, largely thanks to feminist research and the international women's movement. These works have considerably expanded scientific knowledge on the nature, manifestations and consequences of inequalities between men and women in different cultural and socio-economic contexts. They also have influenced public's perceptions, social policies and development initiatives at both national and international levels.

It is common knowledge nowadays that women's poverty, lower education, poor health conditions and lower decision-making power in all domains (except household) are related to gender inequality and have detrimental effects not only on women themselves but also on the social and economic development of countries. It is essential for planners and researchers to take gender into consideration at all times and to do gender analysis whenever they are dealing with social issues, including in natural sciences. There are several reasons for this:

- First and foremost, gender is a fundamental and transversal dimension of all social reality in every known society today.
- From a scientific point of view, sexist research is biased, incomplete, bad research; its conclusions are insignificant and invalid. In other words, sexist research is not scientific.
- From a socio-political point of view, invalid conclusions of sexist research have concrete effects in terms of the content, accuracy and consequences of policies for the population and women in particular.
- In a developmental perspective, university teaching based on sexist research contributes to the reproduction of ignorance and prejudices among the new generations rather than the change toward social equality.

If no scientist today can ignore the well documented consequences of gender inequalities, how is it that gender relations receive so little attention in research pertaining to social issues, for example, the management of natural resources at the community level? No doubt that individual scientists' and institutions' resistance to change and comfort with the *status quo* play a significant role here. But there are also ideological and systemic factors, so profoundly ingrained in intellectual practices and representations that they have become almost unconscious. Among individuals one may find the following:

- a naturalistic vision of men's and especially women's roles;
- a functionalist approach to gender relations in terms of complementarity and symmetry, which fails to acknowledge power relations at play in access to, use of, and control over natural and economic resources;
- a misunderstanding of gender and gender relations, caused by lack of appropriate information and/or adhesion to sexist prejudices and/or succumbing to scarecrow tactics demonizing feminism and women working for gender equality.

Among scientists, there are intellectual misconceptions as well, notably...

- the belief in the neutrality of science, which keeps researchers from recognizing not only that they too are citizens, and thus responsible to fight injustice, but also that, as scientists who possess prestige as well as theoretical and methodological tools, they bear an even larger ethical responsibility;
- the belief in gender neutrality of science and scientists, which contributes to the perpetuation of androcentric knowledge (produced only or mainly by men, from unavoidably a masculine perspective, about mostly masculine preoccupations);
- the belief in objectivity, which means that it would be possible and desirable for researchers to maintain his/her distance from his/her research objects, even when these are human beings, thus ignoring his/her influence on the research process and results.

These beliefs contradict the growing consensus within the international intellectual community around the recognition that a researcher can only work from a partial and particular perspective, and that all knowledge is "situated knowledge" (historically, culturally, etc.).

Even when researchers are willing to do gender analysis and would like to train their students to do so as well, they face, in many developing countries, institutional barriers, among which one finds:

- the absence of courses and programmes dispensing appropriate training;
- a lack of adequate bibliographic resources which could provide conceptual; background, methodological guidelines, case studies, teaching material, etc.;
- the low prestige of feminist research and Women's Studies in academia, which is a direct consequence of women's low status in society and the small proportion of women scientists;
- the insufficient collaboration and networking between scientists from natural and social sciences, where expertise is largely concentrated;
- a weak presence of the social sciences due to past short-term political choices in favor of "hard" sciences, considered more useful to society.

Questions for future work

- Is this diagnosis accurate to describe the situation in your field? Your university? Your country?

- What difficulties have you and your team encountered in doing gender analysis related to NRM or more broadly?
- What needs to be done to build capacity for gender analysis? What concrete suggestions would you make (to IDRC) in relation with CBNRM programme planning?