

# **Thinking Gender in Development Research**

## **A Review of IDRC- Funded Projects (1996-1997) From a Gender Perspective**

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## Executive Summary

This report reviews IDRC-funded projects in the financial year 1996-97. Given IDRC's commitment to gender mainstreaming by strengthening gender research, this report explores how far the goal has percolated to Centre-funded projects and research activities. This involves looking at what gender perspective guides projects, how is it met, and how successful is mainstreaming. This report is an effort to make transparent the Centre's record in promoting equitable development, using gender as a key focus of attention.

This report is guided by three specific objectives:

- a) to develop and apply a gender-sensitive framework of analysis to projects funded by IDRC;
- b) to highlight the strengths and the gaps in the existing practice with respect to the application of gender analysis; and
- c) to generate lessons learned for IDRC policy making, project development and design and future training.

After introducing the terms of reference of the report in **Section I**, a synoptic view of the gender debate in development research in the universe of international organizations and donor agencies is provided in **Section II**. The essential argument made in this section is that gender is a contested concept and the present emphasis on gender mainstreaming within the Centre-supported research is part of a larger effort on the part of donor agencies and governments to create space for addressing gender issues in their activities.

**Section III** focuses on the methodology of this study, the framework of analysis and the analytical and operational definitions used to review the projects.

**Section IV** demonstrates the application of the framework to the reading of project summaries. It explores the projects which demonstrate gender-sensitivity for the quality of gender analysis applied and also takes up a detailed analysis of the research projects which do not address gender.

**Section V** concludes that the Centre's commitment to bringing gender strategic concerns to the centre-stage of development research is visible in a number of good practice projects developed in the financial year 1996-1997. It is also evident in an increasing number of project appraisals identifying the gender dimension of the projects. Whereas these trends are encouraging, the review also reveals that there are serious weakness and the gaps in the existing practice.

**Section VI** makes recommendations for further progress in gender mainstreaming. While the Centre is committed to gender equality as an integral element of sustainable development, this report recommends that this commitment be strengthened not only by engendering the existing project framework but by additionally developing projects which envision a more equitable and sustainable development; fill knowledge gaps in gender-specific issues contributing to social inequalities; and provide legitimacy to the experience of the marginalized groups.

# Section I

## 1.0 Introduction

IDRC through the funding of research wishes to promote sustainable and equitable development. This work is an effort to make transparent the Centre's record in promoting equitable development, using gender as a key focus of attention. There is now considerable evidence that within a large number of donor agencies, there exists a principled commitment to gender equality which provides a fertile ground for addressing gender concerns but this commitment often evaporates at the planning and implementation phases of project. This analysis focuses on the planning stage of research using IDRC project summaries as the data. Ideally, implementation phases of projects should also be studied as such a practice would provide a different set of details about donor practice, but it is beyond the scope of this work.

IDRC-funded projects in the financial year 1996-97 are reviewed. Given IDRC's commitment to gender mainstreaming by strengthening gender research, this report explores how far the goal has percolated to Centre-funded projects and research activities. This involves looking at what gender perspective guides projects, how is it met, and how successful is mainstreaming.

A baseline analysis of gender-sensitivity in IDRC funded projects 1995-1996 (Bromley 1996), suggests how progress towards the goal of gender mainstreaming in the Centre could be gauged. Through an assessment of the research projects funded during the 1995-1996 fiscal year, the baseline study looked at IDRC's current status in meeting its gender goals. The study concluded that there was a scope to increase gender sensitivity in the Centre-funded projects which could be achieved through re-valuing everyday life experiences of women and men by assessing the projects' ability to address sustainable and equitable development and gender-sensitivity, re-thinking the ways in which development is done, and in doing development by incorporating participatory research approaches.

In 1997, Gender and Sustainable Development Unit presented a report to the Senior Management Committee (GSD Unit 1997) outlining IDRC's programming experience over the past decade and putting forth an agenda given IDRC's renewed commitment to gender and development research. The report outlined the need to enhance the mainstreaming effort within the Centre with a specific program and research focus that addressed equity and the relative status of men and women. This report provides a continuity to the earlier studies. This is achieved through an independent review of existing documents.

## 1.1 Objectives of the Study

This report is guided by three specific objectives:

- a) to develop and apply a gender-sensitive framework of analysis to projects funded by IDRC;
- b) to highlight the strengths and the gaps in existing practices with respect to the application of gender analysis; and
- c) to generate lessons learned for IDRC policy making, project development and design and future training.

## 1.2 Organization of the Study

This report is not a critique of the projects and it does not claim to provide a comprehensive framework to monitor overall performance. This review is about illuminating all those assumptions and taken-for-granted ideas about gender that are brought into play in project development and helps to explain why certain projects are gender sensitive while others are oblivious of the reality that interventions are occurring on a gendered terrain. By implication this review underscores the need for self-reflexivity in all research. The structure of the report is as follows.

**Section II** provides a synoptic view of the gender debate in development research in the universe of international organizations and donor agencies. It places gender analyses in a larger perspective of addressing issues of marginalization in development practice. The purpose of this section is to bring back to discussion the evolution of gender debate in the development research, recapitulate the conceptual shifts in the women and development discourse and provide a backdrop to the framework of analysis used in this report. The essential argument made in this section is that gender is a contested concept and the present emphasis on gender mainstreaming within the Centre-supported research is part of a larger effort on the part of donor agencies and governments to create space for addressing gender issues in their activities. This realization itself is an outcome of last two and half decades of women's activism and scholarship for gender-justice and a more equitable distribution of resources and responsibilities.

**Section III** focuses on the methodology of this study, the framework of analysis and the analytical and operational definitions used to review the projects. It also presents a review of some other approaches through which gender issues have been raised in the research and policy domain, making a distinction between "integrationist" and "transformatory" approaches to gender mainstreaming. It also explores the meaning of gender analysis and argues why gender analysis is important for achieving the goals of equality and justice.

**Section IV** demonstrates the application of the framework to the reading of project summaries. It explores the projects which demonstrate gender-awareness for the quality of gender analysis applied and also takes up a detailed analysis of the research projects which do not address gender. The latter is accomplished through a detailed interrogation of the assumptions underlying the research proposals. The purpose of this section is to open space for thinking on gendered assumptions in research design and offer suggestions on how to address and overcome gender blindness.

**Section V** provides the concluding remarks. The report, it is recalled, is based on the first phase of the project cycle, the project summaries, and is exploratory rather than conclusive in nature.

**Section VI** makes recommendations for further progress.

## **Section II**

### **2.0 Gender and Development Research: An Overview**

There is a consensus in development literature that the early development initiatives which preoccupied economists and colonial officials through the 1950s and in the first development decades, largely ignored women. These initiatives failed to see reality as refracted along gender lines, and by and large were based on the assumption that the anticipated prosperity from development initiatives would extend equally to all classes, races and men and women. Following the experience of the Marshall Plan, development was regarded as a technological problem, one that was implicitly assumed to require male expertise from the West and mostly male cooperation in the 'Third World'.<sup>1</sup> Women were regarded as potential beneficiaries, but not as agents of change.

The publication of Ester Boserup's *Women's Role in Economic Development* (1970) broke the dominant tradition in economics whereby the contributions of women

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<sup>1</sup> 'Third World' is used in this report not as a descriptive category but as a theoretical construct. I am aware of and sensitive to the reality that 'Third World' is neither an automatic unity nor a singular entity. Divisions and alliances on the basis of class, ethnicity, race and history are internal to it. But 'Third World' as context refers here to the colonized countries and peoples whose economic, cultural and political structures were deformed within the colonial processes. This context also extends to immigrants of colour and the indigenous peoples in North America, Europe and Australia. I use the term within quotes because it remains problematic, as it suggests homogeneity and hierarchy which we want to contest and criticize.



as workers were ignored. She investigated the impact of development projects on 'Third World' women and by recognizing that women were farmers in Africa and parts of Asia, she demonstrated that development projects founded on the assumptions that women made no contribution to production "got it wrong". She demonstrated that economic development in the 'Third World' has had a differential impact on men and women and that the impact on women had been negative and that benefits from development projects did not automatically trickle down to women and other disadvantaged groups. In the process, she also alerted donor agencies to the mis-allocation of resources that often result from their not recognizing the role of women as key workers in a national economy.<sup>2</sup>

## **2.1 Women in Development (WID): The Institutional Response to Women's Marginalization in the Development Process**

Following the debate on marginalization of women in the development process fueled by Boserup's work, women involved with development issues in the United States lobbied to bring the evidence of women's marginalization to the attention of U.S. policy makers. They began to use the term "Women in Development" (WID) in their efforts to influence the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) policy. Their efforts resulted in Percy Amendment 1973 which required gender-sensitive social impact studies on all development projects, with the aim of "helping to integrate women into the national economies" of their countries (Parpart 1996).

The United Nations World Conferences on Women provided another critical rallying point for an international movement through which feminists world-wide voice their demands. Since the 1970s the movement has called upon states and international development agencies to make development practice more inclusive, just and equitable. An early institutional response to this was the setting up of women in development (WID) bureau within both national governments and international agencies which funded and/ or executed a variety of women's projects. Although WID policies and programs continue attempts to integrate women into development planning, WID approaches have been criticized for their lack of attention to the paradigm of development and for Western bias in program initiatives (Bandarage 1984, Tinker 1990, Mohanty 1991, Scott 1995).

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<sup>2</sup> Boserup (1970) presented an analytical and statistical work in the field of development economics for non European economies and societies to argue that in view of the vital role women play in agriculture and in organized and home-based work, it is the recruitment of women to the modern sector that helps to accelerate the growth of economy beyond the rate attainable by the use of male labour alone. She stressed the cultural and historical specificities of modes of production in different parts of Asia, Africa and Latin America to assert the dignity of women's work.

IDRC established the Women in Development (WID) Program in April of 1987. The WID program was designed to address the perceived need for more responsible gender-sensitive research. It was felt that since consideration of gender within development was increasingly being acknowledged as interdisciplinary in scope, bordering on and intersecting different subject areas, the program was mandated to operate cooperatively as a Centre-wide facility. The main objectives of the Program were to focus on gender issues in development contexts and where appropriate, to integrate those issues into the Centre's research programs and activities (O'Rourke 1989). The WID Program succeeded in raising consciousness about gender issues through its many activities in the Centre. It made a modest beginning towards the acceptance and integration of gender analysis in all research activities.

## **2.2 The Dilemmas of a WID Paradigm**

The WID paradigm has its origin in the liberal discourse which promotes free markets, voluntary choices and individualism. WID programs thus generally subscribe to modernization theory, generally stress western values and target individuals as the catalysts for social change. Modernization theory depicts 'Third World' societies as traditional, authoritarian and male-dominated and modern ones as democratic and egalitarian. WID thus shows sensitivity to the oppression faced by women in traditional 'Third World' societies. WID, however, fails to realize that 'Third World' women's marginalization in the development process is attributable to a wide variety of factors; some of these factors are gender-related, others derive from a market-based pattern of growth that systematically generates acute class differences and social hierarchies (Beneria and Roldan 1987). Despite changes over time, WID policy and practice has remained consistently grounded in the assumption that women need to be integrated into the existing development process. But the potential of the development process to deepen women's marginalization is not questioned. WID focuses on gender parity or gender balance in representation, but development itself is not interrogated from a gender perspective nor is development reimaged to include gender equality.

The WID integrationist approach builds gender issues within existing development paradigm. Widening women-and-gender concerns across a broad spectrum of sectors is the key strategy within this concept. The overall development agenda is not transformed, but each issue is adapted to take into account women-and-gender concerns. A good example of the 'integrationist' approach is the practice of designing WID 'components' in major sectoral programs and projects. Women are 'fitted' into as many sectors and programs as possible, but sector and program priorities do not change because of gender considerations. WID is a discourse preoccupied with issues of access, a preoccupation which can, but does not necessarily, intend a gender-just outcome in terms of expanding the power and autonomy of women in controlling their own lives.

WID policies often see basic assumptions about men and women, the existing division of labour and resources, and traditions that bind women into subordinate positions as sensitive areas into which agencies consciously or unconsciously are reluctant to tread (Parpart 1995). They are reified as culture, and therefore placed outside the development mandate, a point to which I will return again in Section III.

### **2.3 'Third World' Women's Contribution to the WID Critique**

Not surprisingly, throughout the UN women's decade, 'Third World' women activists tended to work outside the government-sanctioned WID efforts, organizing at the grassroots level on many issues of concern to women (Jahan 1995). Much of the work at grassroots was shaped by a conscious critique of the WID frameworks or generated by increasing dissatisfaction with mainstream analysis. In the mid-1980s, at the end of the women's decade, members of a 'Third World' feminist research group, Development Alternatives for a New Era (DAWN), published a landmark critique of development's impact on women. Sen and Grown (1987) analyzed the impact of development policies on 'Third World' women from the perspective of women, and proposed an alternative model. The authors challenged the universality of feminism by underscoring the significance of race, class and nation. Their vision, as Visvanathan (1997) notes, is universal in its compass and feminist in its tone and calls for a world where 'basic needs become basic rights' and men share equally in the care and the nurturing of children. This vision is to be operationalized through women's organizations that work for the empowerment of women, movements that revolve around specific issues and causes, and networks and coalitions that bridge women's groups.

Feminist debate on the issue of women's integration to development processes have been intensifying among activists, policy makers and academics during the past few years. 'Third World' feminists' contribution to this debate is fundamental as they articulate a demand for gender equality in the opportunities of development and in decision-making processes' as well as women's involvement in all spheres of life in the processes of social and economic transformation. They maintain that no amount of special programs will succeed in integrating half the population of the countries (Jahan 1995, Mitter 1989, Dankelman and Davidson 1988). What women need, it is argued, is not integration but a fundamental reorientation of existing development paradigms (Sen 1995, Parpart 1995).

Donors historically have been more responsive to the 'integrationist' perspective (Jahan 1995). Instead of changing policy, programs and investment priorities, they take an "add-on" integrationist approach - adding a few specific measures, and WID staff and projects. The institutionalization of WID, rather than its 'operationalization', becomes a priority concern. As Jahan recounts, donors spent the greater part of the

Decade for Women (1975-1985) advocating the adoption of WID mandates, policies and measures.

In the post-Nairobi decade with 'Forward Looking Strategies' adopted, donor's commitment to and resourcing of WID increased significantly. Most agencies adopted WID policies and measures, and introduced WID mandates. Some of the initial approaches also came under review. Several agencies substituted other goals for the objective of 'integration'. Many agencies changed the nomenclature of their programs from WID to GAD, arguing that while WID focused primarily on women, a gender approach, by focusing on the socially constructed roles of both men and women, looks at women and men in the context of society and was better suited to cross-sectoral analysis (Rathgeber 1990, Moser 1993).

## **2.4 Women in Development (WID) and Institutionalization of Gender Planning: Opportunities Missed?**

While looking back at the institutionalization of gender planning, specifically with regard to the creation of separate WID bureaux in various international donor agencies, Caroline Moser concluded that recognition of gender as a policy concern did not result in its automatic institutionalization into the wide range of agencies implementing policies in the 'Third World'. Goetz (1995) concurred with these views. By the early 1990s the slow pace of progress in improvements to women's status and well-being underlined the need for new strategies. In this context, 'mainstreaming' gained currency amongst international agencies and governments as a new strategy aimed at bringing women's concerns into the centre stage of development.

## **2.5 Mainstreaming Gender**

**Mainstreaming** as a concept reflects a desire for women to be at centre-stage, part of the mainstream and challenges the assumption that the situation of women and men are given equal weight in development practice. But how would gender equality become part of the mainstream within development research? There are generally two approaches in mainstreaming: 'integrationist' and agenda-setting (Jahan 1995). The latter approach has also been termed as a 'transformative' one (Kabeer and Subrahmanian 1996), and as 'institutionalizing a gender perspective' (Goetz 1995).

**Integrationist approach** as argued above builds gender issues within the existing development paradigm. The overall development agenda is not transformed, but each issue is adapted to take into account women-and-gender concerns. The translation for many development practitioners of "integration" has been to fit women into as many sectors and programs as possible, without changing the priorities of the

program. More often than not, development practitioners translate integrationist approach to mean 'fitting' women (somehow) in.

**Agenda setting/Transformative/Institutionalizing gender perspective** implies the transformation of the existing development agenda and a redistribution of existing resources and responsibilities in a more sustainable and equal manner. It means addressing gender strategic needs. The participation of women as decision-makers in determining the trajectory of development priorities is the key strategy here: women participate in all development decisions, and through this process bring about a fundamental change in the existing development paradigm. Women not only become a part the mainstream, they also reorient the nature of the mainstream. It is not simply women as individuals but a new 'agenda' which gets recognition from the mainstream.<sup>3</sup>

Agenda-setting projects are difficult interventions involving complex practice and negotiations. Institutionally, by bringing women's issues into mainstream policies, programs and projects it is hoped that the problems of marginalization will be overcome. To carry out this mandate, development organizations are attempting to integrate gender concerns into the very institutional structures and procedures responsible for development work.<sup>4</sup> WID/gender units, bureau, divisions, and focal points have been formed across a wide range of organizational contexts, their mandate being to institutionalize, or "make routine", gender issues in the organization's work (Goetz 1995, Razavi and Miller 1995).

Mainstreaming was adopted in IDRC framework in 1992-93 with a Centre mandate of mainstreaming gender and the integration of a gender perspective in all

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<sup>3</sup> GSD mission of gender mainstreaming is guided by this agenda-setting framework.

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Sandra Whitworth (1995) for an analysis of gender mainstreaming in ILO and IPPF. Whitworth concludes that the structure and priorities of ILO currently are providing a hospitable space for gender mainstreaming whereas IPPF is losing initial commitment in its current practice. Razavi and Miller (1995) studied the efforts by the UNDP, the World Bank and the ILO to institutionalize gender issues. They documented how the three multilateral agencies responded to the issue of gender mainstreaming by laying down a clear organizational mandate. They conclude that while a clearer organizational mandate to promoting social justice through the framing of international labour standards proved to be an asset for addressing gender concerns in the case of ILO, the lack of a more substantive mandate served as an obstacle to effective internal policy advocacy of behalf of gender. Josette Murphy (1997) studied mainstreaming in World Bank lending and concluded that bank-supported projects with gender-related actions achieved their overall objectives more often than did projects without. The study recommends that the bank should link gender analysis and social assessments, making sure that performance indicators measure results separately for men and women. Also see Jahan (1995) for a critical analysis of the mainstreaming practices at the World Bank and the United Nations Development Programme.

IDRC's programs and projects (GSD Unit 1997). Mainstreaming gender and the integration of a gender perspective in all IDRC's program projects was introduced in 1992-93 Program of Work and Budget (PWB). Mainstreaming was re-emphasized in 1993-94 PWB: "Research support will be provided for training and outreach activities to strengthen the capacity of IDRC and its partner institutions to produce gendered knowledge and to strengthen the use of gendered knowledge for sustainable development" (GSD Unit 1997).

The Centre introduced the mandatory practice for projects over \$100,000 to assess gender social concerns in projects (Management Policy Manual 1993). In 1994-95, the Centre claimed that learning from international development experts' observation that 'women in development' programs were often dismissed as a women's thing, IDRC based its work on the idea that gender and development is everybody's concern. In 1995-96 the Centre's mandate was as an organization committed to sustainable and equitable development and it strived to incorporate a gender perspective in its program work. In 1995-96, the Centre introduced the mainstreaming fund - Expert and Advisory Services Fund - to support a range of activities that promote the mainstreaming of gender in the Centre's activities.

The Centre's mandate in the same year (1995) read: "the gender dimension of development is fundamental to all undertakings at IDRC: the Centre is committed to gender equality, recognizing it as vital for sustainable development."

## **2.6 Section II Summary**

This section explores the evolution of experience which informs much of the recent thinking in gender and development. It was argued that institutional shifts from WID to GAD within IDRC are consistent with prevailing discourse on the subject. The distinguishing notions between integration and agenda-setting interventions have permeated the Centre's thinking on mainstreaming gender.

As gender analysis has been required of all projects with budgets of \$100,000 or more since the beginning of fiscal year 1993/94 this analysis of Centre-funded projects represents a good proxy for looking at the prevalence of gender analysis within projects and simultaneously offers an opportunity to share information about agenda-setting and transformational projects the Centre has already funded. Within this context a framework and method of analysis for describing IDRC projects using gendered categories are described next in Section III.

## **Section III**

### **3.0 Framework and Methodology of Analysis**

Section III presents a framework of analysis and a method to operationalize concepts that emerge from the framework presented. Section 3.1 discusses the key concepts in gendered research which define the framework of analysis of this report. The theoretical concepts are then operationalized in section 3.2 in a discussion on relevant questions for reviewing the projects. The framework which emerges from the discussion in sections 3.1 and 3.2 is schematically illustrated in Figures 1 and 2. Once the framework and method of analysis are described, Section 3.3 discusses the details and the manner in which the sample is determined.

The framework benefits from and draws on important work in the field of gender research. This body of work is adapted to allow for a review Centre-funded research projects. Besides works that have been cited in the discussion in the preceding sections, the review framework has adapted Kabeer and Subrahmanian's (1996) categories of gender-awareness. Kabeer and Subrahmanian have used a set of gender categories to describe gender sensitivity in development planning. Making use of the same categories, a discussion is developed and expanded so as to incorporate the experience of development research into Kabeer and Subrahmanian's gender planning framework. No attempt was made to evolve new categories of analysis mainly for two reasons: first crowding the field with new categories of analysis is avoided; and second, expanding and establishing nuances within the existing framework contributes to the mainstreaming debate more meaningfully particularly when a theoretical framework is applied to a sample of projects.

### **3.1 Key Concepts in Gendered Research**

The following key concepts are germane to this study.

**Gender** is a way of distinguishing between biological difference and the social construction of maleness and femaleness. It refers to the distinctive qualities of men and women that are culturally created. The concept of gender helps to explain that women's inferior status in society is not determined by their biological sex but is constructed socially. Furthermore, gender is not a homogenous category; it is internally differentiated and elaborated by class, race/ethnicity, age, culture and other hierarchical social relations which organize a society's institutions and practices.

Gender is also a relational concept and implies a relationship between men and women. The assumption thus that "women's issues" are only women's concern, and

that these issues may be marginalized from “larger” considerations about political and economic considerations, are thus misplaced. Gender is not about women: it refers to a structural relationship between men and women which is linked to the state, the economy, and to other macro- and micro-processes and institutions.

Gender relations seek to shift attention away from looking at women and men as isolated categories to looking at the social relationships through which they are mutually constituted as unequal social categories. Gender is constructed through a society's assignment of some activities to women and others to men. Gender relations are constructed out of the activities of actors and institutions and as such they are subject to change. In other words, gender relations vary historically.

Gender relations are, more often than not, unequal. They often signify a relation of subordination and domination between women and men. The condition of their existence and transformation depends upon existing and changing power relations, upon the material conditions which give rise to existing and new forms of social action.

In sum, gender is a socially constructed relationship between men and women which is often unequal, historically variable and subject to change. Gender relations are constituted, like all other social relations, through the rules, norms and practices by which resources are allocated, tasks and responsibilities are assigned, value is given and power is mobilized. Gender relations, in other words, do not operate in a social vacuum but are products of the ways in which institutions are organized and reconstituted over time. To overcome inequality it is important to recognize that unequal relations are made in history through social construction and not in nature and hence can be unmade through organized human intervention.

**Gender Analysis** is a process of looking at a policy, project or program to assess how well it is likely to meet its aims and objectives for gender just, equitable, sustainable economic and social development. Gender analysis helps to explore the different needs of men and women in the particular social and cultural space and draws on the way that particular culture engenders meanings about men's and women's roles, their labour, and their relative status in that space.

Gender analysis also identifies gender biases in problem posing, solving and analyzing. In doing so gender analysis prepares the way for gender planning and helps to provide a gender sensitive approach to the project. It is thus an ongoing activity through the various stages of the project. The purpose of gender analysis is to ensure that the issues and concerns that affect the entire communities, i.e., both men and women, are addressed taking into consideration the needs and claims of both women and men and not by privileging the needs of some members of the community or assuming that the implications of intervention are gender undifferentiated.



Gender analysis has a social transformatory purpose and potential as it may point to a change in the existing division of power between men and women. The important issue entailed in gender analysis is that gender division of power is often unequal, i.e., in the favour of men to the disadvantage of women. Gender analysis means taking account of gender relations and questioning the segregation of sex-roles and distribution of resources and responsibilities. Merely looking at the sex-segregated data does not imply gender analysis. Gender analysis means a conscious focus on and, sensitivity to existing gender relations, gender division of labour, gender division of resources and gendered systems of power to reveal who benefits from project initiatives. Consistent with the definition of gender, gender analysis allows internal differentiation to allow for elaboration by class, race/ethnicity, age, culture and other hierarchical social relations within the analysis.

**Gender-blind** research is implicitly premised on the notion of a male development agent and which, while often couched in apparently gender-neutral language, is implicitly male-biased in that it privileges male interests and priorities in the distribution of opportunities and resources (Kabeer and Subrahmanian: 1996). Gender-blind research does not acknowledge the unequal division of resources and responsibilities between men and women. It is important to note that a gender-blind framework *dismisses* and not simply *misses* the unequal relations between men and women. In some literature this phenomenon is termed “gender-neutrality” and such research as “gender-neutral”. However, neutrality implies equal distance and/or equal representation of the existing gender roles and responsibilities. Gender-blindness involves a denial of such differences and by implication gender-blind framework privileges male interests as human interests and as a social norm. In this sense, gender-blindness contributes to sustaining unequal gender relations. (For examples of gender-blind research, see discussion in Section IV).

**Gender-sensitive** research, in contrast to gender-blind processes, recognizes that both women as well as men have social agency, that they are constrained in different, and often unequal ways, as potential participants and beneficiaries in the development process and that they may consequently have different, and sometimes conflicting needs, interests and priorities (Kabeer and Subrahmanian: 1996). It is the recognition of gender differentiated reality and the realization that men and women may have different interests, goals and preferences. Gender-sensitive research could have many levels and it ranges from a researcher’s sensitivity to recognizing existing gender division of resources and responsibilities in order to realize certain predetermined goals and objectives, to focusing on a specific sex in order to meet certain gender-specific needs more effectively to proposing a new agenda which (potentially) transforms the existing gender relations.

Gender sensitivity in research, in a nutshell, is a reconstructive project which ranges from including marginalized actors to critically examining the reality from the

perspective of these actors. It is a process of evolution and change and is marked by several levels of critical engagement with gendered reality. The following categories of gender-sensitive research may help to identify certain levels in these processes. These categories are not discrete and can be overlapping but at the same time they represent the many layers of the continuous process of change. It is important to note that the process from inclusion to interpreting the gendered reality and finally transforming it, requires researcher's constant interrogation of her/his own assumptions about social relations and reality.

### **Categories of gender-sensitive research**

(a) **Gender-neutral** research: In this category of projects there is a recognition of the existing gender division of resources and responsibilities in order to realize certain predetermined project goals and objectives. But while there is a recognition of the (often unequal) division of existing resources and responsibilities, the research does not make an attempt to address this division. It assumes the existing productive and reproductive division as natural and avoids any analysis of current power relations. Thus to achieve the overall goal of improving agricultural productivity, a gender-neutral version of a food systems project at the Centre, for example, will acknowledge the contribution of women and men to improving, say, the productivity of a particular crop, *but it will not question the existing gender division of resources and responsibilities*. Similarly, a project such as the "Regional Fund for Agricultural Technology" which is geared toward research activities for increasing productivity in priority agricultural areas and addressing issues related to the management of natural resources, acknowledges the gender division of labour in the farm sector. But the research does not question gender division of resources and responsibility while choosing and formulating the problem nor does it aim to impact the existing division.

Thus, a gender-neutral research is not dismissive of gender differential divisions of resources and responsibilities but it misses the power dynamic in defining the existing gender relations and hence is unlikely to impact the existing divisions. Unlike the gender-blind approach which is dismissive of gender differential impact of project interventions, a gender-neutral version of intervention recognizes the divisions and distributions within the households and communities but does not act as a catalyst of change.

(b) **Gender-specific** research: This research involves focusing on a specific group/sex in order to achieve certain policy goals or meet certain gender-specific needs more effectively. Like the WID approaches, this favours marginalized gender groups and has the potential to challenge existing "natural" division of labour as it addresses intra-household relationships and the current power situations. However, gender-specific research intends to meet targeted needs of a particular group within existing distribution of resources and responsibilities.

Such a research activity is often the result of an approach of counteracting the bias, both conscious and unconscious, against a particular sex/gender group. Since the focus is on a specific group, this intervention increases visibility of research needs of such a marginalized gender group.

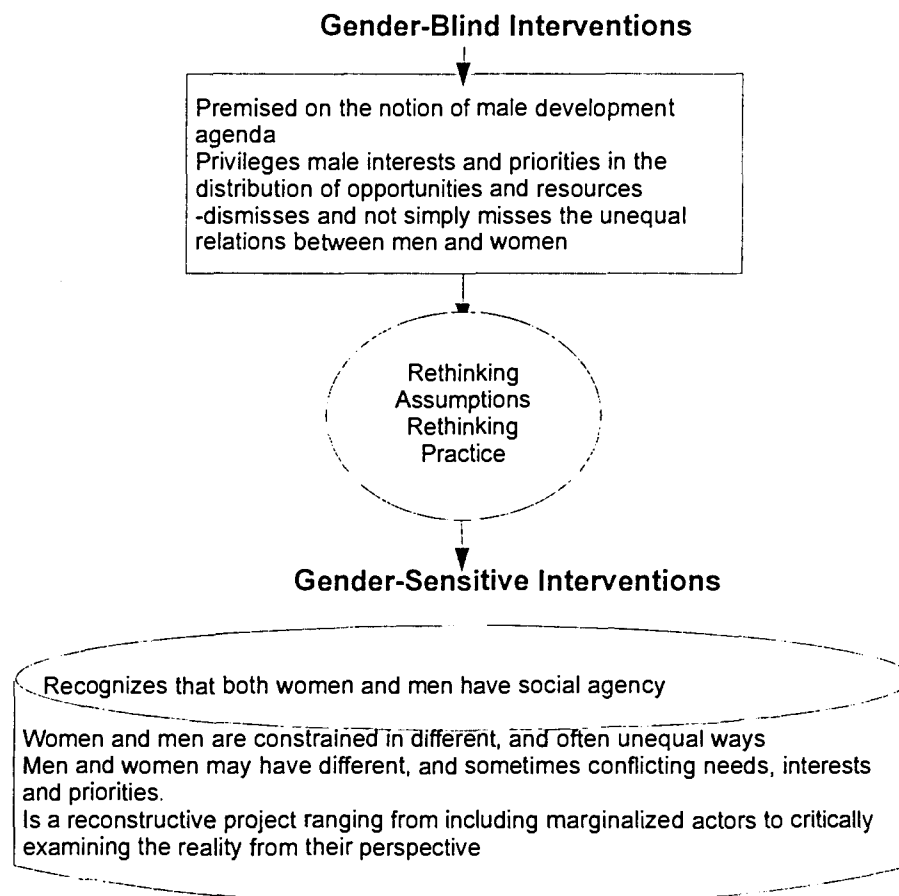
On the other hand, gender-specific research also has the danger of slipping into "fixing the women" administrative approach. It may also reify and naturalize the existing gender roles if in attempting to counteract the bias, it fails to bring about a change in the existing roles and fails to envision new roles.

(c) **Gender-transformative** research: Such an intervention may target women, men or both and recognize the existence of gender-specific needs and constraints but it additionally seeks to transform the existing gender relations in a more egalitarian direction through the redistribution of resources and responsibilities (Kabeer and Subrahmanian 1996). The crucial element in transformational thinking is redistribution in such a way that the advance is sustained. Equally important is that women should themselves feel that they have been the agents of the transformation that they have won this new space for action themselves (Young 1993).

Gender-transformative research is the result of a vision of transformation which will potentially create new space for marginalized groups to articulate their rights. It articulates the demands of a gender-just order.

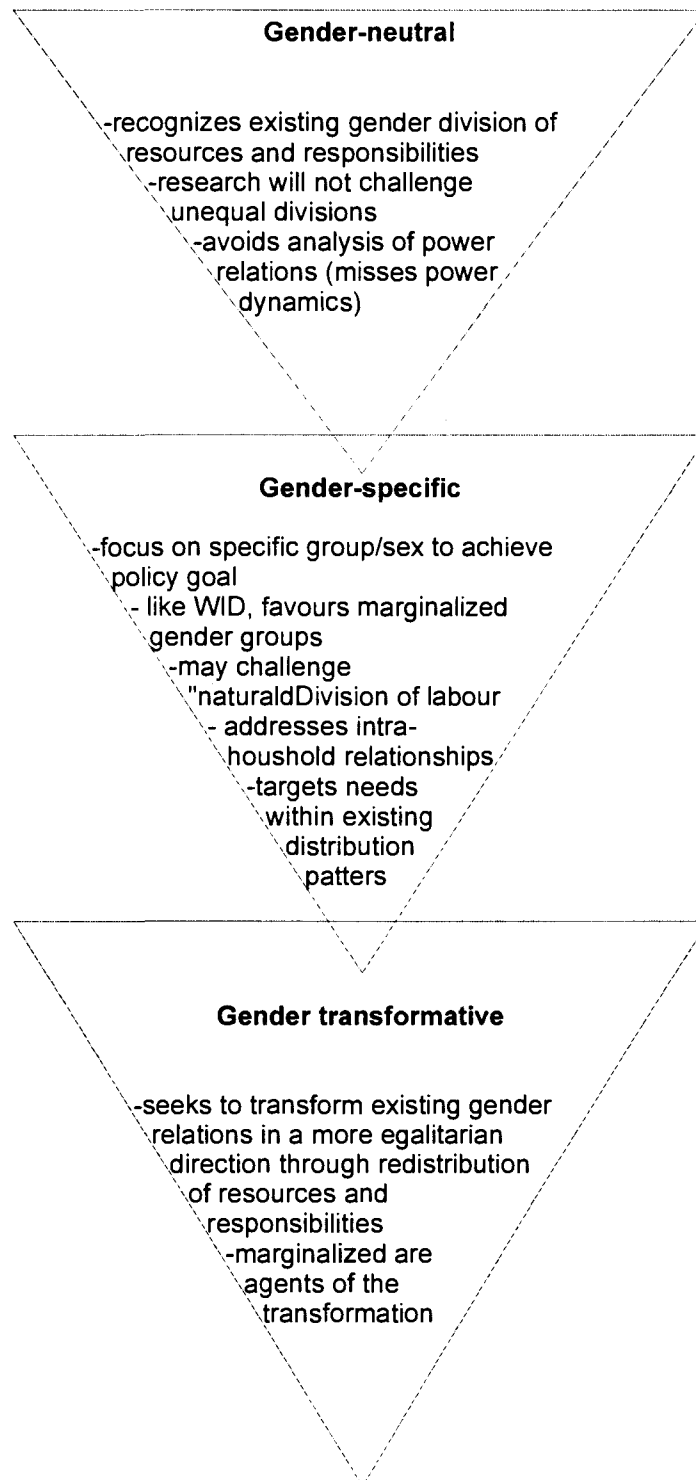
Figure 1

### Gender-Awareness in Project Interventions



**Figure 2**

**Levels of Gender-Sensitive Analysis and Intervention**



Figures 1 and 2 are a schematic representation of the above discussion. These figures depict the nuances of mainstreaming within the context of donor-funded research. Project interventions are presented in two main categories: gender-blind and gender-sensitive analysis. Gender-sensitive analysis is subdivided further into three categories: gender-neutral, gender-specific and gender-transformative. Figure 1 illustrates that the process of moving from gender-blind to gender-sensitive analysis requires the researcher to rethink her/his own assumptions about gendered social reality and relationship with people whose reality she/he is seeking to transform. However, rethinking assumptions and practices from a gender perspective need not automatically result in research frameworks which directly address unequal relations between men and women. Figure 2 illustrates that the extent to which research becomes relatively more gender-sensitive also depends on the vision of transformation of gender inequality. A gender-neutral intervention leaves distribution of resources and responsibilities intact and presents only a minimum level of sensitivity of gendered reality. Gender-specific research intends to meet targeted needs of a particular group within existing distribution of resources and responsibilities but may contribute to knowledge creation for effective intervention for change. Gender-transformative research intends to transform existing distribution in a more equitable manner and seeks to build a gender-just order.

### **3.2 Method of Analysis: Operationalizing the theoretical concepts**

From the preceding discussion, a research methodology to operationalize the above framework emerges. The questions informing the analysis are meant to make explicit the gendered nature of research projects and to elaborate on the strengths of analyses undertaken within them -- all from a gender perspective. The questions formulated to review the material, are followed by the rationale for each question.<sup>5</sup> These questions are also available in Appendix 1 in summary form.

*Was gender analysis carried out?* This first question seeks evidence to answer the obvious. Information regarding gender roles, distribution of resources, and expectations about use and implications of the resulting research was gathered.

*At what level are gender concerns incorporated into the Project Summary (PS)?* As discussed in Section I, gender mainstreaming has emerged as a strategy to overcome the problems of marginalization that are associated with women-specific projects. From a progress perspective, and in taking advantage of lessons learned as a result of donor assessment of WID and GAD programs, it is helpful to ascertain if and how projects have avoided problems of the past. One of these problems has been the "add-on effect" of looking at women in isolation, and almost as separate to the integrity

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<sup>5</sup>Some of these questions were framed following the discussion in Josette Murphy (1997)

of the research project. This question sought to find out if gender equality informed the research question, and if gender concerns were included in the project objectives and methodologies.

*What types of roles were addressed?* Here, information about the productive, reproductive, and community roles of women and men in the project was sought. Thus, any information about productive, reproductive and community roles was assessed and details about how the research was thought to strengthen or bring about a change in the roles was also collected.

*Is transformation in existing gender differential labour compensation envisioned? If so, how?* In social practices gender roles are not only different but they are rewarded differentially. Women's and girl children's labour often go unrecognized and unnumerated. Research often recognizes gender differential roles but is silent about differential reward practices. Examples of transformations articulated in projects include evidence on access to resources, (including the relative quality of that access), or an expressed goal to suggest policy level changes to promote equality in remuneration.

*Where the resulting research implied a change in labour inputs, what level of detail exists regarding productive and reproductive roles of men and women?* In most societies, men and women usually have different productive and reproductive responsibilities. If the potential outcomes of the research involve a change in the labour demand, timing or assignment of priority, the new demands may conflict with existing ones. Thus an assessment about the level of analysis on existing roles and responsibilities and information about managing potential shifts has to be identified.

*What argument is used most frequently to justify gender-related activity?* As the shift from WID to GAD embodies shifts in emphasis on the rationale for promoting gender equality, this question, while by no means conclusive, can help to inform where IDRC staff and research recipients are with respect to the current debate. Typical rationales for addressing gender may be based on equity (i.e., ensuring that men as well as women benefit from project activities), welfare or efficiency arguments.

*What role did the project appraisal accord to identifying the gender dimensions in the project?* Project Summaries (PS) are made up of appraisals and proposals. The project appraisals are written by IDRC staff. One of the goals of the mainstreaming strategy has been to make gender a routine concern of the Centre's work including research, operations, and policy advice. Thus, project appraisals were reviewed and situated on a three-point scale according to how gender was addressed in the appraisal: crucial to the research, marginal to the research, irrelevant to the research.

*What is the gendered nature of the project?* Following the response to the above questions, the final question was included to present an overall picture about where the project fits into the research framework. Consistent with the framework described in subsection 3.1, the projects were categorized using the following terms: gender-blind, gender-neutral, gender-specific or gender transformative.

### **3.3 Sampling Criteria**

This section explains the manner in which data was generated and how the sample was determined.

As has already been stated, since FY 1993/94 the Centre has required a gender/social analysis of all projects of more than \$100,000. Also, the GSD Unit has described a mainstreaming approach for the Centre that is both integrationist and agenda-setting (transformative). The Centre considers the gender dimension of development as fundamental to all undertakings at IDRC and is committed to gender equality (CPF II). Thus, IDRC funded projects continue to represent a relevant resource to assess the extent to which gender concerns have permeated the core of the Centre's work — the research it funds. Thus, projects of \$100,000 or more constitute the initial population.

The Centre's IDRIS database is used to generate a list of all projects of \$100,000 or more in the FY 1996-97. The IDRIS database identified 126 projects which were funded by the Centre during fiscal year 1996-1997<sup>6</sup>. Paper copies of these project and radius numbers, project title, project abstract, grant dollar value and the regional focus of the projects were obtained.

Within the population of 126 projects, the IDRIS database also generated a list of projects that addressed gender<sup>7</sup>. The IDRIS key word search based on the IDRC projects of more than \$100,000 (active and closed) funded in FY 1996/97 identified a sub-sample of 13 gender projects. However, our preliminary review of a few Project Summaries revealed that there were projects in the list which were good practice

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<sup>6</sup> I gratefully acknowledge Susan Hodges's help in generating this list.

<sup>7</sup> When searching keywords in the IDRIS database, words from the title, abstract and subject descriptor fields are retrieved. The full project proposal is not entered into the IDRIS databas. The IDRIS search includes an expanded list of keywords including gender, equity, equality, women, sex disaggregated data, girl child, and reproductive roles, among other terms.

projects but which did not form a part of those 13 projects generated by IDRIS. This revealed the limitations of the IDRIS keyword search: gendered projects were found outside of this sample. Similarly, more than one of the 13 projects identified by IDRIS as potentially gender sensitive, lacked evidence to support the claim, after the PSs were examined closely. Thus, unlike a similar study in a previous year, a decision was made to expand the sample to include all projects more than \$100,000 funded in FY1996/97 for the purpose of this review. Therefore, the analysis in this report is based on an independent and comprehensive review of PSs and is not limited to the 'gender projects' generated by IDRIS as the keyword search is no guarantee that gender will or will not be addressed in projects.

Project summaries were located and copied<sup>8</sup>. The project summary includes a project appraisal written by the IDRC program officer and a project proposal which is submitted by the research recipient. Although the total number of projects funded in FY 1996/97 more than or equal to \$100,000 is 126, this review is based on an analysis of 118 projects as the remaining project summaries were not available at the time of writing this report.

## **Section IV**

### **4.0 An Analysis of Project Summaries**

This section presents an analysis of Project Summary documents based on the framework and method of analysis outlined in Section III. An overview of project appraisals is presented followed by an analysis of the research proposals which are categorized into gender-sensitive and gender-blind projects. Gender-blind projects are discussed thematically according to the fallacy which they demonstrate. The point of the latter section is to reveal common assumptions held in research that may limit the possibility of addressing both efficiency and equality in research for development.

#### **4.1 Project Appraisals and Identification of Gender Issues**

The project appraisal represents an opportunity for Centre staff to rigorously assess the merit of a research proposal from a number of analytical perspectives including from a gendered one. While the IDRC contact person will often play a collaborative role in developing a research project with research partners, the appraisal is actually written by the IDRC staff person. Recognizing the role of IDRC staff in developing and funding projects, it is helpful to reveal any trends in the project appraisal in order to gain insight about how gender analysis is perceived and practiced by IDRC staff.

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<sup>8</sup> I gratefully acknowledge the help of Ray Vallaincourt, Alain St-Hilaire, and Jun Conde at the Records Office in locating and copying the PSs.



A good majority of the project appraisals from FY 96/97 identify gender dimensions in the projects. While there was a range in quality in addressing gender, a good number of appraisals addressed gender issues clearly. Some appraisals mentioned that gender was not addressed in the proposal but had been flagged and would be taken up in the next phase of the project cycle or that a gender expert would be engaged to deal with this aspect separately. However, there were also a good number of cases where the appraisal underlined the gender dimension in the project but the proposal did not address gender at all (see, Summary Table 1), and no explanation was provided about the plan to integrate gender concerns into the research. For instance, "Indigenous Strategies for Intensifying Shifting Cultivation in S. E.

Asia" appraisal underlines how women and men have made substantial and often differential contributions in maintaining diversity and intensive farming based on different sets of activities they are involved in. The project proposal, however, does not recognize this. The project thus has a lot of potential to address gender issues but these are not explored in the research proposal. There are several other project examples which fall into this category, some of which include: "Methods and Tools for Policy Assessment", "Industrial Support Units", "TRAMIL: Central American Network on Medicinal Plants", "Innovative Institutions for Community Resource Stewardship: Making Canadian-Asian Partnership", "Foodlinks", and "Social Policy Decentralization".

#### 4.2 Analysis of Project Proposals

Projects were screened on the basis of the project proposal suggesting any level of gender sensitivity ranging from a proposal which specifically presented a gender analysis of the project to the one that directly or indirectly presented facts which had a clear gender dimension and accordingly categorised as gender sensitive, gender blind or hard to assess on the basis of project proposals. See Summary Table 2.

Summary Table 1

Project Appraisals and Identification  
of Gender Issues  
n = 118

Clearly address gender issues in projects	79 (68%)
Gender issues to be taken up at a later stage/ Will be given due consideration later	09 (7%)
Claim that "project has no gender dimension" or "Project does not address gender"	27 (23%)
Gender para is missing in the appraisal	03 (2%)
Total	118 (100%)

Summary Table 2  
Category of Projects  
n=118

Category of projects	# of PSs
Gender-sensitive	33
Gender-blind	70
Hard to assess based on the PS	15
Total	118

Those proposals which demonstrated any degree of gender sensitivity and any level of gender analysis were explored further in terms of the depth of analysis. The research projects which did not address gender, the gender-blind projects, were taken up for a detailed analysis and their assumptions interrogated with a purpose to open a space for dialogue and for future consideration.

### 4.3 Gender-Sensitive Projects

Summary Table 3  
Gender-Sensitive Projects  
(n=33)

Gender-transformative	2
Quality Gender Analysis provided	19
Gender-neutral	14
Total	33

From the 118 projects reviewed, 33 research projects (see Table 3) addressed gender but reflected different levels of gender- sensitivity which ranged from agenda setting priorities to only identifying gender roles. In terms of sheer percentages, this shows an improvement over the sample of projects reviewed in FY95/96.<sup>9</sup>

Some of the projects reviewed demonstrated a high level of gender analysis with a collaborative approach to participation that truly give potential beneficiaries a voice in decisions affecting their lives. Gender-sensitive proposals are located in different themes and PIs. The diversity of projects in different categories is striking: they include projects like - engendering labour market statistics, development of gender statistical program in Arab countries, health project in Tanzania, technological development through gender analysis (CIAT), livestock in ecoregional research, adolescent and social change in Egypt are part of different PIs/Unit including Ecohealth, Cities Feeding People, Sustainable Use of Biodiversity, Gender and Sustainable Development, Assessment of Social Policy Research and Peace Building and Reconstruction. (See Appendix 1 for a list of projects with gender sensitive project summaries).

A few of these 33 projects are clearly transformatory (agenda-setting) in nature. For instance, "Engendering labour market statistics" breaks new ground by proposing to explore a methodology to incorporate accounting for unpaid labour in GDP figures.

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<sup>9</sup> The comparison is made difficult as the sample for the study in FY 1995/96 was based on a different criteria.

Similarly, "Development of Gender Statistics Program in Arab Countries" explores a range of new dimensions by proposing to design, implement and institutionalize a national gender statistics program in Arab countries that can be used as a tool for developing and monitoring good public policies. These projects broke new ground in gender research.

There are other projects which reflect a good level of gender analysis. The projects such as "Adolescence and Social Change in Egypt", "AIDS Affected Children", "Ecosystems Health (Tanzania)", "Improving Technological Development Through Gender Analysis" and "Livestock in Ecoregional Research" to name only a few, clearly address gender at all levels of the proposal, and introduce the research problem as refracted along gender lines. What makes these projects specifically important is the details of gender analysis carved out at different stages in presenting the research plan.

Other projects recognize gender division of labour, identify gender roles and may also collect sex-segregated information but they do not question the existing divisions of resources and responsibilities nor do they explore redistributive options. In this sense, they can be better termed as gender-neutral. This is not to undervalue the significance of generating sex-segregated information, especially when there exists a legacy of 'statistical *purdah*' (Chen and Dreze 1995) where women's realities are concerned. On the surface, this study seems to support the notion that conceptual gender biases in data collection continue to prevail. The most visible example of this type of *purdah* is in recording women's labour force participation where their presence and activities are under reported. "Scientific Basis of In-Situ Conservation of Agricultural Biodiversity", "Environment Action Centers", "Indigenous Fisheries Development and Management", "Generating Incentives for Sustainable Natural Resource Management", for instance, recognize the different roles of men and women in farming, fisheries, and also in conserving plant genetic resources and hence make visible gender division of labour within households and communities. However, they do not dwell on the implication of the proposed research on gender divisions and how this research could be used to alter the situation which is often unequal.

It was also somewhat intriguing to find project appraisals identifying or highlighting gender dimensions of the projects when the proposals showed total oblivion to gendered social reality. It is hard to imagine that the proposals that did not examine reality as refracted along gender lines in the design stage will incorporate gender analysis at some other stage in the project.

## 4.4 Gender-Blind Projects

A large number of project summaries (70) did not address gender. (See, Summary Table 4). These projects overlooked gender differential roles, interests, and resource distributions. This tendency seems to reflect an inability of the project to perceive the different roles and responsibilities for women and men within the realm of productive and reproductive activities and consequently, a failure to realize that research projects could have different implications for men and women. Some of these projects used broad aggregations (household, community, institutions) and did not break or interrogate the gender dimensions within these broad categories.<sup>10</sup> Other projects were generally 'people-blind'. These proposals elaborated "technical" details of the projects but failed to explore consequences of the proposal or policy on women or men.<sup>11</sup>

For a good majority of these proposals, the project appraisal identifies gender issues. These issues are, however, not touched in the project proposal. For some other projects, the project appraisal notes that there are no gender dimensions of the project or that there are gender dimensions but these have not been addressed due to cultural reasons, or a lack of capacity on the subject, or the paragraph on gender/social dimension of the project is missing in the appraisal and the issue is not addressed

Summary Table 4

Projects Not Addressing Gender  
(broad, generalized, and sometimes  
overlapping reasons)

Fallacy of Aggregation (household, community, institutions not interrogated)	36
Generally people-blind (Only "technical" details discussed in the proposal/ compartmentalizing social reality/ policy consequences not explored at the micro level)	29
Public/Private codified Women's productive labour overlooked	05
<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>70</b>
Projects hard to assess from the proposal	15
<b>Total</b>	<b>85</b>

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Two examples include: 'Assessing the Sustainability of Community -Managed Forests', 'Market-oriented Smallholder Periurban Dairying'.

<sup>11</sup> For instance, 'Industrial Support Units- Nicaragua', or 'PAN - Bhutan'.

elsewhere in the PS. When only considering the PS, these projects thus suffer from gender-blindness.

For other projects, it was hard to assess gender-awareness. They were either ambiguous or provided insufficient information to reach a conclusion. Most of these are awards, fellowships or grants projects. These proposals do not suggest how gender will be incorporated in the awards or grants framework.<sup>12</sup>

Kabeer and Subrahmanian (1996) argue that gender-blind projects are the result of wrong assumptions and practices which inform research and policy and which in turn stem from the norms, beliefs and prejudices of the researchers. Some of the assumptions and practices which have lead to gender-blind policies belong to the broader category of 'people-blindness' with often harsher effects on women; others are more specifically related to gender-blindness. These assumptions, in turn give rise to different types of fallacies in analyses.

What follows is an elaboration of the implications of these assumptions and fallacies arising from such analyses.

**Fallacy of fragmentation of reality:** There is often a distinction made between what are termed as the "technical" topics of research and research on "social" issues. Research projects on fisheries, oceanography, agricultural or communication technology, or research based on disciplines of economics often exclude a discussion on gender as relevant to their focus on efficiency, growth or productivity.<sup>13</sup> A review of IDRC projects revealed this tendency. Such projects are seen as purely 'technical' projects with little relation to 'social'. There is thus no need to do a gender analysis, it is assumed, since these projects are not directly informed by social issues.

Research methodology informing these projects is often built around techniques of carrying out research; and often overlooks how scientific research is genderized through belief systems. They do not recognize the ways in which science/technology is a human activity and, as such, reflects the ways in which particular technical interventions are defined, understood, given meaning and evaluated by the particular

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<sup>12</sup> For instance, 'New Canadian Partnership Grants', "Cambodia Researchers Forum".

<sup>13</sup> This was also the conclusion of Staudt's (1990) study.

society. Epistemologically, this fallacy originates in looking at fragmented reality and viewing scientific research as separate and autonomous of social relations.

In “technical” projects there is only a belated recognition, if any, of the gender dimensions. This leads to a “women also” approach where a project on infrastructure development, for example, is cited as a gender project on the grounds that ‘women walk on the road too’ or a project on connectivity through internet termed as sensitive to gender issues as women will use the facility too! It is not asked, for example, what implications the final output will have on existing gender social relations, or how will it impact existing inequalities in skills, access and employment opportunities or who participated in defining the trajectory of change.

Projects on exploring ways of increasing global competitiveness of the small scale industries or particular sectors (such as, tourism), for example, do not explore the conditions on which unregulated competitiveness hinges such as, lower wages or the sexual exploitation, often of women and children. Proposals on capacity building in economic research do not reflect gender as an important area for capacity building.<sup>14</sup>

The general practice in the design of “technical” projects is to assume that technical expertise is the only crucial matter in such projects’ appraisal. The project appraisal in such cases evaluates or comments on the ‘technical’ capacity of the research team. The agency/ research institution/researchers’ capacity to work on social or gender issues is seldom part of the appraisal. The failure to see the linkages of the “technical” projects with social factors arises from the error of fragmentation or compartmentalization of reality where technology is assumed to be autonomous.

**Fallacy of neutrality of macroeconomic policies:** Another fallacy arises from the tendency to assume that macro policies are “gender-free” i.e. that they are blind to gender differences. Consequently, gender implications of macroeconomic policies are not addressed in such projects. A project on developing methods and tools for policy assessment, for instance, proposes a research program to assess the impact of the economic reform program by developing new methods but does not discuss how

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<sup>14</sup> ‘African Economic Research Consortium - Phase IV’ project appraisal notes that capacity- building in economic research has been going on without recognizing gendered implications of policy. However, engendering economics is not part of the project objectives nor does the proposal identify a single area in gender capacity-building research.

gender issues will inform the nature of tools and methods explored. Project beneficiaries are identified in gender undifferentiated categories. Similarly, 'Industrial Restructuring, Innovations and International Competitiveness in Latin America' seeks to understand the nature of transformation in Latin America without recognizing that industrial restructuring is a highly gendered process. Feminist economists have pointed out, through detailed studies, that the current restructuring of global economics has had profound effects on women and men's lives and that global restructuring is occurring on a gendered terrain. But this research is unaware of these developments in the field.

The implication of this kind of gender-blindness is that the research fails to take into account the asymmetry of gender relations and the fact of women's subordination in economy and society. Furthermore, it ignores the implications of the gender division of labour; ignores women's unpaid work in reproduction; and ignores intra-household gender relations by focusing on the household as an undifferentiated unit in which members share common preferences.

**Fallacy of aggregation:** Gender blind research suffers from another form of fallacy, that of aggregation. This pertains to the use of abstract, generic categories: the poor, the labour force, the community, farmers, and family, which disguise the differentiation and hierarchy within these categories when dynamics and allocations within these aggregates need to be examined. Researchers often assume an ideal type household with a male breadwinner making decisions on behalf of a dependent housewife who is primarily concerned with child care and housework performing her 'natural' reproductive responsibilities. Hierarchies of labour, consumption and status are seldom interrogated within this household.

If the household is probed intra-household divisions become clearly visible. An ecosystem health project on plague control in Tanzania, for instance, concluded about gender differentiability in plague vulnerability by probing the living patterns within the house hold. The project discovered that women and children were more vulnerable to plague because they slept on floor and more prone to rodent attack unlike the male household heads who had access to a raised bed. By not assuming away a non-hierarchical household, the project was able to generate valuable information cutting across households.

The project "Participatory Plant Breeding in High Altitude Village", on the other hand strived to generate practical understanding of agro- biodiversity and community-

based seed breeding. The proposal builds a participatory methodology but without commenting on gender differential roles and how changes would effect these roles and in whose favour. From the PS, participation was assumed to incorporate gender. However, the terms on which gender is addressed in the participation debate was seldom explored.

Many more examples can be cited from the projects reviewed.<sup>15</sup> To make the argument that the assumption of a non-hierarchical household is as much a figment of the researcher's imagination as 'community' is and any research addressing households or community has to interrogate the practices within these aggregations.

**Fallacy of codification of public/private boundary:** Gender-blindness also arises from the codification of boundaries between the 'public' and the 'private'. These boundaries mark gendered spheres of activity, where the subject of the public and economic arena is male and that of the private and domestic arena is female (Goetz 1995). This is a failure to recognize that it is not a natural division and has its roots in the development of industrialization and commodity production which moved many traditional forms of production out of the home and into the factory. In contrast to earlier societies, therefore, the home ceased to be viewed as a centre of economic production and came to be seen as a refuge from economic production.

It is, therefore, important for the researcher to point out that areas that are viewed as 'private' do not necessarily have to be kept that way. Failure to point this out is to perpetuate the cycle of the unequal gender division of labour and resources within what is understood as public and private. The exclusion of women, or the failure to adequately address gender in projects relating to the various aspects of economy, for instance, confirm and institutionalize the arrangements that distinguish the public from the private.

This fallacy often takes the form of assuming women's responsibility to care for children and other members of the household as their maternal/natural responsibility. This denies women the compensation for their reproductive labour and also denies women's contribution to productive labour. An interesting example is "MAP's Health Care and Household Coping Mechanism" proposal. In this proposal household is the

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<sup>15</sup> See, for example, 'Resource Centre for Urban Agriculture, Animal Husbandry and Forestry',



unit of analysis and the methodology entails generating data on health indicators and coping mechanism. The proposal indicates that within the household mothers will be interviewed as “they are the keepers of family health”. While the project rightly acknowledges the reproductive labour of women in keeping the family/community health, it may also fall into the assumption that reproductive labour is the only form of women’s labour. It may end up assuming that mothering is women’s natural vocation; not arising out of a gender division of labour in history but in nature if the researcher is not reflexive and not constantly interrogating her/his assumptions. Furthermore, if it is not examined that who within the household picks up the burden such a focus could result in increasing women’s burden. The result of these blindness is that some costs, for instance, of adjustment, can be shifted from the paid to the unpaid economy, and, as a result, disproportionately on to women who are the primary workers in the unpaid economy, and who are often subordinated by gender relations within the household.

**Fallacy of homogenization:** Another issue arising out of the aggregation problem is to see women as a homogenous category with identical needs and interests. Women working in the computer industry as professionals have little in common with women workers in a garment factory or working in the subsistence farm and even in most modern industries equality in terms of pay, or skill formation may not have taken place. But how the assumed homogeneity of interests could lead to totally untenable conclusions is evident in the project appraisal of the project “Asia Canada Consortium on Enterprise Systems”. While maintaining that the project will address gender by ensuring the participation of women who have acquired expertise in software industry, the appraisal goes on to quote from a corporate journal that “[o]nce upon a time power was in patriarchy... The subordination of women made for success. Now the opposite is true...” To draw the conclusion about the reformed nature of patriarchy on the evidence of the entry of some women into the software industry is a clear conceptual leap which arises from several fallacies but partly explained by the fallacy of homogenizing the situation of women.

**Fallacy of naturalization:** Gender blindness may also arise from what can be described as the fallacy of naturalization. Research projects are often designed with an implicit assumption that gender relations are fixed or unchanging. It is often the case because unlike development and macro policies, researchers do not have a ‘model’ for transformation of gender relations. Based on this assumption women’s and also men’s identities are cast in an unchanging tradition and hence naturalized.

At a very basic level, this denies the making and unmaking of tradition in history. Culture/ tradition is often invoked for resisting attempts to rethink and challenge gender inequalities. It is understandable that envisioning change in certain traditional practices is a difficult terrain especially when the western agencies are reprimanded for pushing modernization/westernization through project interventions. However, more often than not tradition/culture are invoked when some form of redistribution of resources and responsibilities is going in favour of women. Processes like SAP, commercialization of agriculture and shift from subsistence to cash cropping involve a massive restructuring of personal and community lives and relations; and research and policies often think little of exploring and interfering in most personal matters, such as, physical relations, through family planning or AIDs related activism. But one would hardly come across an appraisal which, for instance, maintains that connectivity through internet should not be proposed in X society because it undermines the cultural forms of communication which the communities are used to; or new business practices for economic efficiency should not be explored because they would potentially upset the traditional freedom that independent artisan has enjoyed historically, or the prospects of commercialization of fisheries should not be studied as it potentially undermines the customary rights of local fishing community or commercialization of water should not be explored as water is a traditional “common”. But tradition/culture is invoked, for instance, if land rights, pay equity, or women’s employment or inclusion are under question.

The argument is that women are considered the conduits of culture/ tradition which is built on marginalizing women’s interests. Traditions and gender relations in a society are made and unmade, they change forms with changes in economy and polity and often have different meanings for men and women. In this context it is important to see how women’s groups in the concerned region are engaging the issues of gender inequality through research and how are they articulating women’s issues.

## **Section V**

### **5.0 Concluding Remarks**

This report provided a review of the Centre-funded projects to assess the Centre’s record in promoting equitable development. Using gender as a category the report reviewed 118 Centre-funded projects in the FY 1996-1997. The report found that the Centre’s commitment to bringing gender strategic concerns to the centre-stage of

development research is visible in a number of good practice projects developed in the financial year 1996-1997. This trend is also evident, in an increasing number of project appraisals identifying the gender dimension of the projects. Whereas these trends are encouraging, the review also reveals that overall there are serious weakness and gaps in existing practice.

The report demonstrates that a large number of projects continue to suffer from gender-blindness. Gender-blindness, it is argued, is the result of researchers' gender-biases arising out of inaccurate assumptions and practices which inform research and policy. These assumptions and practices, in turn stem from the beliefs and prejudices of the researchers and give rise to different types of fallacies in analyses.

The report thus concludes that it is important to interrogate institutional practices which consciously or unconsciously contribute to gender inequalities. Based on the examples drawn from the Centre-funded research projects, the report makes evident the implications of fallacies of analyses and how they reify existing gender relations and perpetuate inequality. The report, however, is based on the first phase of the project cycle, the project summaries, and is exploratory rather than conclusive in nature.

Following Goetz (1995), the report concludes that institutionalizing gendered perspective or mainstreaming involves the establishment of a 'strategic presence' for women's gender interests in policy research where there is legitimacy for the expression of the interests of women as a gendered social category endowed equally with values and resources and with potentially different ambitions for the way policy research is pursued.

## **Section VI**

### **6.0 Recommendations**

The Gender and Sustainable Development Unit is dedicated to promote and facilitate gender mainstreaming within the Centre, and gender-sensitivity in research for development projects funded by the Centre. It is committed to gender equality as an integral element of sustainable development. IDRC affirms this commitment by making mandatory gender-based analysis of all research proposals submitted to IDRC and by defining and strengthening of gender research as a Centre-priority.

This report recommends that this commitment be strengthened not only by engendering the existing project framework but by additionally developing projects (i) which envision more equitable and sustainable development by challenging the existing gender distribution of resources and responsibilities; (ii) more projects which generate new knowledge and fill knowledge gaps in gender-specific issues contributing to social inequalities; and (iii) more projects which provide legitimacy to the experience of the marginalized groups to address their potentially different needs and claims.

The report also recommends that both research managers and funded researchers engage issues in gendered research. Gender is a complex issue but it is not an “additional” issue which can be dropped for want of resources (time, energy or financial) or integrated at will at any point in the project cycle. Gender is an integral part of an equitable, just and sustainable research development practice and has to be addressed at all stages of the project cycle including proposal and planning.

The presence of a good number of project appraisals which highlight gender issues in the projects is a pointer to the increasing and stronger commitment to gender-aware research among the Centre researchers. However, this commitment is slowly translating into project development as is evident in only a few projects falling under the category of gender-sensitive research while a majority suffer from blindness, at least in the first phase of the research project. As is often the cases with policy processes, issues that are marginalized in the conception stage of policy processes rarely find resonance in the final policy. Within research, neglected issues in design are less likely to find their way into the project in its implementation. There is thus a need both to design projects that are more gender-sensitive, and to directly address traditional gender-biased assumptions in the project proposals. Increasing the amount of resources for and responding to transformatory research needs could further the Centres progress in promoting sustainable and equitable development.

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## **Appendix 1**

### **List of questions used in analysis**

**1. Was gender analysis carried out?**

gender roles identified

gender distribution of resources identified

gender differential implications of the project identified

unequal gender power relations identified

**2. What types of women's roles were addressed?**

productive

reproductive

community

**3. At what level are gender concerns incorporated into the PS?**

in stating the problematic or posing the problem

objectives/planning

operation

methodology:

Specifically, categories like household, community, farmers etc.  
interrogated?

Sex-segregated data generated/analysed?

**4. Is transformation in existing gender differential labour compensation envisioned? If so, how?**

**5. Where the resulting research implied a change in labour inputs, what level of detail exists regarding productive and reproductive roles of men and women?**

existing gender demand/roles/timing recognized

new tasks identified

difference in first two recognized

remedies suggested



6. What argument is used most frequently to justify gender-related activity?  
equity, poverty alleviation, welfare,  
efficiency, empowerment, any other
7. What is the project approach/ research approach?  
participatory interdisciplinary  
top-down single discipline
8. Does the research team include a gender resource person?
9. How are project beneficiary identified in the project  
gender neutral categories  
gendered categories
10. What role did the project appraisal accord with identifying the gender dimensions in the project?
11. What is the gendered nature of the project?  
gender-blind  
gender-neutral  
gender-specific  
gender transformative.



## Appendix 2

### List of gender-sensitive projects (varying degrees of gender sensitivity)

1. Engendering Labour Market Statistics: A Need For an Overhaul (03427, GSD)
2. Development of Gender Programme in Arab Countries (02803, Pre-PI)
3. Improving Technological Development Through Gender Analysis (03310 CGIAR Link)
4. Livestock in Ecoregional Research (50245, Pre-PI, Food)
5. Special Expert and Advisory Services Fund for Mainstreaming (03092, GSD)
6. Adolescence and Social Change in Egypt (03159, ASPR)
7. Environmental Learning with Communities and School in Eastern and Southern Africa (552674)
8. Tropical Disease Research (Phase X) (03444, Pre- PI)
9. AIDS Affected Children (03227, Pre-PI)
10. Ecosystems Health Tanzania (03189, EcoHealth)
11. Net Gain Africa ITN Task Force (Insecticide Treated Nets) (03390, TEC)
12. People and Resource Dynamics in Mountain Watersheds (40340, CBNRM)
13. Generating Incentives for Sustainable Natural Resource Management (3267, SUB)
14. Environment Action Centres Phase II (50211, SUB)
15. Monitoring and Evaluation of Poverty Alleviation Program (Peru) (50256, ASPR)
16. Indigenous Fisheries Development and Management in LAO (40366 CBNRM)
17. Urban Horticulture Technologies, Haiti (3152, CFP)
18. Scientific Basis of In-Situ Conservation of Agricultural Bio-diversity (3231, SUB)
19. International Network for Bamboo and Rattan (96-8300, Sub, TEC, Food, Intesep)
20. CBNRM in Myanmar (40350 CBNRM)
21. Regional Program on Social Policy Reform (East and South Africa) (03129 ASPR)
22. Dessert Margins Initiatives (Africa) (03347, SUB)
23. Vietnam Economic and Environmental Management (03099, MIMAP)
24. MAP's Health Care and Household Coping Mechanism (02852, MIMAP)
25. Telework in India: Implications for Employment, Trade and Social Equity (03220, TEC)
26. Science, Religion and Development (03309, SIP)
27. Niassa Environmental Research and Sustainable Development Program (03529, PLAW)
28. Ancestral Domain and Resource Management, Philippines (40368, CBNRM)
29. Global Collaborative Postproduction Research Network (03420, Food)
30. National Disertification Audit (South Africa) (03559, PLAW)
31. Agricultural Policy Transition Project - South Africa (96-8910, PBR)
32. Foundation to Provide Political Support for Non-Formal Education in Sahel (96-8155, LFC)
33. Environmental Research and Development Programme (03529)