

# Debates on gender development and empowerment sociology essay



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In this chapter, debates regarding women and development, women and sustainability, gender and empowerment, and gender and micro-credit will be discussed.

### **3. 1 Gender and Development**

An important distinction has been made between two concepts: GAD (Gender and Development) and WAD (Women and Development). The two are different in the sense that WAD is mainly focused on women generally, while GAD prefers the term gender than the term Woman. The approach of GAD mainly integrates women in development, but prioritises gender. The approach links its goals to sustainable development. Jaquette and Staudt as cited in Jaquette and Summerfield (2006) are against the idea saying that WAD and GAD have not succeeded in addressing issues in developing countries. The authors agree that women cannot wait only for the actions of donor's agencies; women's labour is the key to addressing the issue of development. " Gender Planning in the third world "(1988) is a foundation of GAD approach (Moser cited in Jaquette and Summerfield (2006: 28) while WAD viewed women as mothers. GAD is able to respond to the gender differences among women (culture and norms) while WAD views woman as active agents as individuals are aware of their position due to the discrimination and subordination (Young cited by Visvanathan et al. 1997).

#### **3. 1. 1 Notions of sustainability and gender**

Questions have been raised about the relationship between gender and sustainability beginning in the 1970s with the feminism theory and, shifting during the 1980s to the democracy agenda by the 1990s (Jaquette and Staudt) cited in Jaquette and Summerfield (2006: 18). Women's critics from <https://assignbuster.com/debates-on-gender-development-and-empowerment-sociology-essay/>

Rio (1992, Earth Summit) have been made concerning the real roles played by women in sustainable development. In the 1987 conference, where the last definition of sustainable development has defines as “ development that meets the needs of the present generation without compromising future generation’s ability to meet theirs (Brundtland Report). So the term women, environment and development has been changed to “ women, environment and sustainable development” (Braidotti et al.) Cited by (Visvanathan et al. 1997: 56) . The fight of women over the thirty years shows that women have made changes in relation to women’s empowerment. Women need to remain involved in these discussions so that what have been gains so far will not be lost.

### **3. 1. 2 Gender, agriculture, and the environment (food security)**

Within the broader gender and development literature there is a strong emphasis on both the environment and agriculture; women have been called the “ producers of life”; they are those who made things grow. Shiva cited in Visvanathan et al. (1996) explains the process of producers as follows: the interaction with nature (conception), appropriation of nature (to give birth), and the lastly, that women are the first producers in a productive economy. One the other handsome literature emphasizes on women overwhelming in substantive and some economic agriculture (Boserup cited by Visvanathan et al. (1996) The term women as “ invisible workers” has been used by some authors like Dixon (1982) cited by Bisnath (2011) and Otobe citeb in Jain and Elson (2011) to emphasize the fact that that women are the main care providers in society and work even though they are sometimes unpaid or not

recognized. Particular visible data in agriculture (national and international level) for example or United Nations (UN) does not count or measure women's labour force participation. They are seen as wives and mothers and not farmers ((Jaquette and Staudt) cited in Jaquette and Summerfield (2006: 24).

Agarwal (2010) argues that woman cannot be differentiated from the environment because she is part of the environment. Women are the ones who are responsible for cooking (firewood) and cattle for gathering. These domestic activities are done mostly by woman, who is why women cannot be separated from the environment since, they depend on it. According to the Ministry of Agriculture (Burundi), agriculture is the main source of income for over 90% of the population. It is clear that the agricultural sector is important in the social and economic life of the country.

### **3. 1. 3 Gender and Development in Ongoing Conflict Contexts**

During the war and conflict, women and girls are mostly affected than men. Women lost their lives but also many lost their husbands and relatives. They have been raped by and forced to have sex with the rebels. They lost everything including the capacity to produce food, which was their main livelihood. They became refugees, and were grouped in the displacement camps inside the country (World Vision, 2011). As conflict lessened and recovery began, many women had difficulty resuming their farming and livestock ventures. Often, they had lost the resources related to livelihood sustenance (Koen 2006).

Women political leaders try to bring significant improvement in the lives of women when they are facing limited access to resources and income in the context of conflict. Even in the context of peace, it is difficult to talk about women's agency because patriarchal cultural structures exacerbated inequalities, as in the most societies in the world, but perhaps particularly in this context also (Senanayake 2004). On the other hand, Manchanda (2005) points out how women have a voice in the peace process. Women in Burundi have been included in peace talks, as mentioned early. Many women were involved in community management and have taken advantage of that role.

### **3. 2 Gender and the concept of ‘ Empowerment’**

Many definitions of empowerment are central to power and access and control over resources. On the other hand, some definitions focus on the inequality between men and women. Kabeer (1999) claims that the term empowerment has not yet been well enough defined and Mosedale (2005) agrees that the concept of empowerment is not clear because there are many definitions used by different people.

Sen and Grown (1987: 78) state ‘ that empowerment is a strategy that will get us from here to there’. In other words, empowerment is a notion of process, as in development theory (see Rostow 1960). Bebeta(2007) recognizes that since empowerment is not an outcome but a process, measuring women's empowerment has limitations. Mosedale (2005) argues that empowered cannot be given by a third party like development agencies or made to happen by outsiders. Futher he also notes that empowerment tends to be more collective than individual and that it does not have finality or a clear moment of achievement. No one can say she arrives at the stage  
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of being fully empowered. This is a linear understanding of empowerment and while this makes sense because without any change there would not be empowerment, other scholars do not see empowerment as a linear process (Cheston and Kuhn 2002). They state that empowerment means change, choice and power. It is a process of change by which individuals or groups with little or no power gain the power and the ability to make choices that affect their lives. The authors give this definition of women's empowerment as an ability to have access to the material, human and social resources to make strategic choices in her life. Access to materials does not explain empowerment or equality fully however. Three impacts measure empowerment: the impact on decision making and on self-confidence (agency), the impact on women's status and gender relations in the home (domination of women) and the impact on family and domestic violence. Mechanisms that contribute to empowerment may be training on business skills, education and literacy, family and work responsibilities, and social and political issues (Ibid. 2002). At the United Nations Women's Conference in Beijing in 1995, empowerment was adopted as a requirement for a better world for women (Townsend 1999: 20). Generally, women are more marginalized, vulnerable and often the poorest in the world. My findings illustrate that the definition of empowerment depends on the needs and interests of those defining it.

### **3. 2. 1 Microfinance and gender**

Numerous factors have increased interest in regard to micro finance as a promoter of gender equality. There is recognition by the participants of this study that access to credit and resources increases the quality of daily life.

But it has not been a 'magic bullet' to resolve all problems and many challenges remain. Access to credit is not the only factor that can empower women. Besides credit, agriculture and environmental activities must be supported as well. But given the Burundian patriarchal system where it still difficult to inherit land as a woman, unless you can buy it yourself, the strategy of micro credit without addressing the question of access to land may fail.

### **Examples supporting microcredit**

Sarumanthi and Mohan (2011) stated that microfinance through self-help groups has been recognized internationally as a tool to reduce poverty. To explore the link between women's empowerment and microcredit beneficiaries, the authors used three dimensions: psychological, social and economic. Their conclusion is that microfinance has brought courage, knowledge about income generating activities and self-confidence and that through these programs women are given freedom to express their opinions. Mawa (2008) presents microfinance as a meaningful contribution to alleviate poverty for rural people in Bangladesh. Microfinance is a tool to improve the quality of life of people with limited access to permanent financing, which is why development NGOs and other organizations have adopted microfinance as a component in their interventions. The author argues that microfinance contributes to achieving the MDGs and that low-income countries cannot set targets for financial sector access without microfinance. The limits to microcredit are also acknowledged by Mawa (2008) and include the negative ramifications of directing programs only at poor people and therefore participating in constructing categories of poor people.

Swain and Wallentin (2009) explore evidence that there is a significant increase in the empowerment of women in self-help group members. All members have not been empowered at the same level, but they argue that since women's empowerment is not easily measurable, it will remain variable. Given the complexity of the concept of women's empowerment, its interpretation and its measurement also vary. Microfinance can lead to women's empowerment through two mechanisms direct and indirect, according to Swain and Wallentin (2009). Women who become members of a group and participate in trainings and workshops are involved in direct empowerment. It is called indirect when microcredit is given by other ways.

Hashemi et al. (1996) provide one example of microcredit successfully empowering women. They evaluated the impact of micro credit programs using a combination of case study data and survey data from Bangladesh. To explore the link between women's empowerment and micro credit, the authors used eight indicators of empowerment: mobility (going to market, seeing a movie outside the village, visiting a medical facility, etc); economic security (owning a house, having any productive asset); ability to make small purchases (such as cooking oil, soap, etc.); ability to make large purchases (such as pots and pans, the family's daily food, children's clothing); involvement in major household decisions (individually or jointly with the husband); relative freedom from domination within the family (been prevented from visiting her birthplace home, money or land or jewellery taken against her will); political and legal awareness (know the name of member of parliament, Prime Minister, or local government official); and participation in public protests and political campaigning (campaigning for a



political candidate or protesting with others against a man beating his wife, a man divorcing or abandoning his wife). Their findings showed that microcredit is empowering rural women.

House (2000) provides another success story through a case study evaluation of the impact of microfinance. His main conclusions were as follows: women were informed about their loans, women were the ones make the decisions regarding the use of the loan, women were confident and able to speak in public, borrowers have been elected to village committees, women were respected by other members of the community, and the majority of the staff running the project were women. Defining success in a microfinance program is to include a set of complex factors such as ethnicity, gender, income, health, and access to land, capital, politics, power structures and hierarchies. Microfinance has emerged as a key strategy to alleviate poverty

Hashemi et al (1996) evaluate the impact of micro-credit programs and use a combination of case study data and survey in Bangladesh (1, 300 married women under age 50 in 1992). To explore the link between women empowerment and micro credit, the author used eight operational measures of empowerment: mobility (within the market, seeing a movie outside the village, access to medical facilities, etc), economic security (owning one's house, having productive assets), the ability to make small purchases (cooking oil, hair oil, soap, etc.), the ability to make large purchases (pots and pans, buying family's daily food, children's clothing), involvement in major household decisions (individually or jointly with the husband), relative freedom from domination within the family (such as being prevented from <https://assignbuster.com/debates-on-gender-development-and-empowerment-sociology-essay/>

visiting her natal home, money taken against her will, etc.), political and legal awareness (knowing the name of member of parliament, Prime Minister, or local governmental officials), and participation in public protests and political campaigning (campaigning for a political candidate or protesting). These findings show that the micro credit is empowering rural women.

### **Examples of critiques of microcredit**

Mayoux (2000) defines empowerment as economic empowerment (access to savings and credit that optimizes women's own and their household's welfare), increased well-being (increased expenditure on the well-being of themselves and their children) and social and political participation (access to knowledge and social networks). The author questions the interlinkages between access to savings and credit and empowerment since in some cases such programs have disempowered women. For example, sometimes women do not know that men have taken a loan in their names. Kabeer (2000) evaluated the impact of microcredit programs in Bangladesh through a participatory evaluation by women recipients themselves and found that the success of women's empowerment through access to credit can be blocked for a variety of reasons. First, the husband uses the loan. Second, after having used the loan, the men are unable to repay it, so women borrowers are obliged to pay back the loan using other resources. Finally, the inability or unwillingness of some men to repay the loans leads to intensification of tensions within the household (violence for example). Reinforcing this point, Goetz and Gupta (1996) challenge the credit performance in Bangladesh. The authors state that women's male relatives

use a proportion of their loans while women borrowers bear the responsibility for repayment.

Another example of disempowerment is that the time spent by women in savings and credit meetings may reduce women's time for other social or political activity (Mayoux 2000). Leach and Sitaram (2002) argue that women's microcredit groups face high risks such as business failure or sabotage through control of resources by men or those more powerful and may not be sustainable. Microfinance does not necessarily lead to economic independence. The group may not have enough experience or limited understanding of the nature of credit, the NGO's may be ineffective in supporting the system, or the group may have poor materials and inadequate skills, etc.

Kabeer (2005) also claims that despite women's access to financial services, which can make contributions to the well-being and economic productivity of poor women, microcredit does not automatically empower women. Women from the same social groups do not necessarily have the same needs. They may not be economically dependent to the same degree, but as members of poor and marginalized groups, they face various kinds of gender discrimination from members of their own community. How needs are addressed and which needs are addressed is contested.

Altay (2007) presents microfinance as a way to fight against poverty rather than a solution. As women are often the poorest of the poor, greater financial security allows women to become more empowered within household and

community affairs. Yet, access to financial resources does not reduce poverty alone.

Ofreneo (2005) contends that microcredit can worsen poverty. The author assumes that international development agencies in promoting women's access to microcredit put a premium on profitability and market competitiveness. Ofreneo (2005) argues that credit itself cannot overcome patriarchal systems of control at household and community levels. The obligation to repay the loans at any cost (in order to meet the agency's repayment) has forced women with failed livelihood projects to work hard and longer, sometimes in jobs they never had to do before.

These examples on both sides illustrate that the question of microcredit and its connection to women's empowerment is complicated and may be context dependent.