POSTSCRIPT

WOMEN IN DEVELOPMENT

Peggy Antrobus

We must recognise the links not only between the fate of Third World women and the politics pursued by the developed countries, but also between the fate of these women and the kind of world the generation of the 21st century of all countries will inherit. We share one planet, and our futures are inextricably linked through the economic and ecological systems which unite us; systems which make it impossible for the majority of the world's people to live with human dignity, force them out of their countries, or into methods and means of survival which ultimately threaten the social, economic and ecological environment of those who perpetuate injustice. There is after all a connection between poverty and injustice, and debt, drugs, militarism, food insufficiency, population pressure and environmental degradation.

Women, although the poorest and most powerless, may hold the key to our 'Common Future'. Poor Third World women are the people who do more than two-thirds of the work in their countries; they are the people who are responsible for meeting the basic needs of most of the people in this world; and they have borne the brunt of the burden of current structural adjustment policies. Their central role in human survival places them at the centre of the balance between sustainable development and ecological disaster. They command our attention not simply out of a sense of justice (the goal of Equality) or expediency (the goal of Development) but because, unless their values, views and visions serve as a central focus for our policy-making, we cannot achieve the ultimate goal of Peace.

Women in development: an alternative analysis

But if the analysis of women's role in development is to help us to achieve this goal of peace — a more just and humane world — we
need an alternative analysis, an analysis which is different from the one which has guided our policies in the past. For after more than a decade of an international programme on behalf of women, the situation of women world-wide remains an indictment of our policies and programmes. Despite the concerted efforts of governments and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) within the framework of the UN Decade for Women (1975-85), the majority of the world’s women, in the countries of the North as well as in those of the South, were actually worse off in 1985 than they were at the beginning of the Decade. For women in the Third World the situation is even worse in 1989! How did this happen?

Instead of pursuing the logic of a structural analysis which linked women’s issues to the call for a New International Economic Order (NIEO), women accepted an agenda which abandoned both the structural analysis and the attention to women’s strategic interests — i.e. those derived from an analysis of the power relationships between women and men, and women and the state. While the focus on meeting practical needs in the areas of employment, education, health and nutrition was important, we failed to recognise that even these practical gains are easily reversed if women lack the power to protect them when resources are scarce. This is exactly what has happened in the context of the structural adjustment policies pursued by most of our governments in their efforts to deal with the problems of debt, chronic balance of payment imbalance, and budget deficits.

But what is this flawed Women in Development (WID) analysis? The Decade’s goal of ‘integrating women in development’ was based on the assumption that women were ‘outside’ the process of development and needed to be ‘integrated’ into the mainstream; and that, if policy makers and planners could be made aware of the important role of women in development, more resources would be made available to them. Women would receive more of the benefits of development — e.g. access to the resources and services required to build their capacity to contribute more fully and effectively to development efforts. A number of strategies aimed to document and quantify women’s work, making it visible to planners. This was the ‘expediency’ approach!

However, the research generated by the Decade showed that women were not ‘outside’ development. Indeed, to many activists and practitioners alike, it was becoming increasingly clear that
women's contribution was central to 'development', the very base on which development was constructed, but in a way that was deeply exploitative of their time, labour, both paid (in the workplace) and unpaid (in the household), and their sexuality. This has been clearly illuminated by the policies of structural adjustment. I would argue that, far from failing to take women into account, these policies are actually grounded in a set of assumptions which assign certain roles and characteristics to women. Indeed, it is clear to me that both components of the structural adjustment policies — those aimed at reducing consumption (the austerity measures reflected in the cuts in government expenditures in social services) as well as those aimed at increasing export-oriented production (the emphasis on the promotion of Free Trade Zones) — are dependent on assumptions about the roles into which most women have been socialised. These roles are mediated by class, race, ethnicity and the level of development of the society. For this reason some people now prefer to speak of 'gender' roles rather than 'women's' roles, to give specificity to the analysis and reveal the differences between women of different social groups.

Moreover, it is because of the central importance of these roles in reproduction, in meeting the basic needs of the poorest sectors of the society, that policies which place them in jeopardy have negative consequences for the whole society, and ultimately for production itself. Production is not only dependent on the availability of capital, technology and markets but also on the physical, psychological and intellectual capacity of the labour force. All of these qualities are determined in the social sector, the sector in which women are key actors, not passive recipients of welfare services. Unfortunately, this critical link between women's productive and reproductive roles is one which is typically overlooked in conventional, growth-oriented models of development.

A gender analysis of these policies calls into question the fundamental assumption of the WID approach. The recognition of women's work has been used to justify cutting resources to them. What is the alternative approach — what I would term the wisdom approach — the alternative analysis of the issues of women, and of development?
**Elements of an alternative analysis**

The following elements are suggested:

The analysis should recognise the differences between approaches or paradigms which aim at maintaining the *status quo* and those 'alternative' paradigms which seek to promote social change, while recognising the limitations of an 'alternative' paradigm which remains focused on an economistic, materialist, and positivist approach to the social sciences. I would argue that lack of explicitness about theoretical frameworks and paradigms has been a major contributor to the blurring of our analysis of development.

The analysis should be one which attempts to relate experience at the micro level of the sector, community, project, or household, to the macro-economic level. A gender analysis of structural adjustment policies illustrates the ways in which macro-economic policies affect women's experiences at the level of the poorest household. Unless this experience is used to inform macro-economic policies, and vice versa (i.e. unless people at the micro level can analyse and understand their situation within a structural analysis) no meaningful change can be effected.

We need an analysis which is holistic i.e. one which seeks to integrate social, cultural and political dimensions into economic analysis. This has been borne out by the futility of focusing on economic production at the expense of the social sector (reproduction).

We need an analysis which recognises the political nature of the processes of development, and that the concepts and causes of 'development' and 'underdevelopment' reflect imbalances of power within and between nations rather than the presence or absence of resources.

Finally, we need an analysis which is feminist in orientation. We need to reject the separation of private and public domains; of the household from the economy; of personal and political realities; of the realms of feeling and intuition from that of rationality; above all we need to reject an analysis which lies within the monetised sector of the economy.
This analysis emerged from Third World women at the end of the UN Decade for Women. This expanding network of women are proposing Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN), and we have established a programme of on-going research, training, communications, publications and advocacy extending from the grassroots to policy making at the international level.

We recognise that: ‘Feminism cannot be monolithic in its issues, goals, and strategies, since it constitutes the political expression of the concerns and interests of women from different regions, classes, nationalities, and ethnic backgrounds.’ And, therefore, would have to be: ‘responsive to the different needs and concerns of different women, and defined by them for themselves’. (Sen and Grown, 1987.)

However, we see this diversity, built on a common opposition to gender oppression and hierarchy, as a first step in articulating and acting upon a political agenda which would include challenging all those structures, systems and relationships which perpetuate and reinforce the subordination of women, everywhere.

Most of all, we see feminism as a transformational politics, with the capacity to transform not only individual lives but all the structures of oppression and domination which shape women's lives, including racism, class and nationality. The concept of feminism itself has been transformed. We argue that there is no issue — from the international debt to military budgets, from the famines in Africa to the industrial disaster at Bhopal — which could not be illuminated by a feminist perspective. Our concern is not just for women, but for our world. Our vision is of:

‘A world where inequality based on class, gender and race, is absent from every country and from the relationships among countries. Where basic needs become basic rights and where poverty and all forms of violence are eliminated. Where women’s reproductive role will be defined ... and where the massive resources now used in the production of means of destruction will be diverted to areas where they will help to relieve oppression, both inside and outside the home.’ (Sen and Grown, 1987.)

Our work is just beginning. We link the past history of development policies to the strategies of the current systemic crises — in the
production and distribution of food, water and fuel availability, international debt, militarism — and a growing conservatism opposing women’s changing roles. As we approach the 21st century, we hope that the perspectives of poor Third World women will be taken seriously in decision-making processes, from our households, communities, and workplaces to national, regional, and international levels of policy making.

Finally, allow me to observe that, apart from the analysis, what we, the members of the DAWN network, have to say is not so different from many of the statements of those Europeans who have given leadership in the efforts to raise a sustainable and human world by alerting an unconcerned northern elite to the ‘Limits to Growth’; to those who call attention to ‘Our Common Future’ (Brundtland); and to the interdependence of North and South (Brandt).

In 1982, at a time when the North-South dialogue had all but ceased, that visionary Italian of the Club of Rome, Aurelio Peccei, wrote in his foreword to the book Making it Happen:

‘At the root of the problem seems to be an incapacity or unwillingness to change our world outlook, our mentality and attitudes. At the very moment when fundamental change and innovation have become indispensable, we seem frozen in our ways of being and modes of doing.’

The founder of the DAWN network, the Indian economist Devaki Jain, had an answer for this when she addressed the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) in Paris in 1983:

‘The more I dissect and analyse and derive and pursue, the more I see hurdles ahead of any attempt to regenerate a just and peaceful society. The tunnel does not find an end through reason alone. But I believe — it is my real belief — that with faith in the ability of humans to change their destiny through their own will and collective determination, I see the potential of a united women’s movement being a force in the world which can heal the divisions and thaw the confrontation and perhaps even the order — the economic and social order.’ (Jain, 1983.)
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References


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