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The State of Development Planning

This section examines the major issues in development planning, identifies some gender-related problems that can arise, and points to possible solutions by way of suggested action points that governments may wish to adapt to national circumstances.

Political Will and Adequate Financial and Other Resources

Some governments do not have an overarching policy or framework which could be used to guide the promotion of gender equality. Many others take a Women in Development approach which fails to address the root causes of gender inequalities. Where gender policies do exist, they are often hampered by a lack of political will and authority to guide their implementation. An explicit gender policy is required, providing guidelines on how government departments should institutionalise gender internally and respond to women's needs in society, such that planning agencies are obliged to implement, monitor and evaluate gendered development goals.

Governments are constrained by a lack of qualified personnel and administrative capacity to implement gender plans and have not accepted that efficient planning is gender responsive planning. Most governments do not have the resource capacity to carry out a gender audit with regard to the existing provision of services.

Advocate for political commitment at the highest levels

Many Commonwealth governments have ratified the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women, and all subscribe to the 1991 Harare Commonwealth Declaration, which pledges governments to work with renewed vigour on, among other areas: "equality for women, so that they may exercise their full and equal rights" (Harare Commonwealth Declaration, 1991: 9).

A strong political commitment to gender equality is demonstrated by the location of the Ministry of Women's Affairs, women's bureau or similar body in a high-profile, central sector of government, such as the Office of the Prime Minister or President, and by the availability of sufficient human and financial resources to mainstream gender across all sectors of government.

Promote participatory democracy and decentralise planning processes

From a gender perspective, participatory democracy can only result from the wide-ranging involvement of women in all spheres of public life and decision-making. Political restructuring in some countries (for example, India at the local government level through the Panchayati Raj, and South Africa) has given new impetus for sectors of governments to review ways to increase women's participation in the decision-making process.

Planning as a process should begin at the local level with representatives of both civil society and government involved. For example, in India, local government elections created the possibility of wide-ranging changes in decision-making at the local level through the quota of 33 per cent of seats being reserved for women as a result of the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments in respect of states.

However, even where such arrangements are in place, a gender perspective is not necessarily integrated, for a number of reasons.

Firstly, women's representation in local government structures does not automatically result in their informed and effective participation in these structures (Taylor, 1996). For this to happen women and men require a critical gender analysis of the roots of women's oppression and the strategic interventions that are possible through their participation. This can only result from gender awareness, training and organisational change.

Secondly, local government decision-making structures such as those in South Africa and India which have more women on them than ever before are a political advance but will only produce results in development terms, especially in planning, if the functions and powers of these structures are clarified and if devolving power to the local level does not mean devolving financial responsibility for the delivery of services and development projects without the necessary resource allocations.

Decentralisation of development planning should therefore include a restructuring of the system, devolving functions and powers from state/provincial governments and ensuring a sound resource base and resource allocations from central and state governments. Most importantly, it should lead to a planning process that promotes strategic gender goals from the bottom up through a co-ordinated system.

Development Planning and Macroeconomic Policy

Traditional methods of development planning tend to be based on efficiency and control and to be driven by a focus on growth. It is now accepted that economic growth on its own is not a sufficient condition for development (UNDP, 1995). Economic growth projections and allocations based on quantitative measures and number-crunching exercises led by state expenditure departments within Finance Ministries do not allow for responsiveness to new priorities or targets and provide little space for engagement with political decision-making processes.

Many governments introduced development planning structures and systems as a means of ensuring that macroeconomic goals were attained. The development plan became the economic policy instrument to ensure a process of setting ceilings for public expenditure, allocations for public sector investment and incentives for private sector investments. Infrastructural development and services within the plan were driven by economic goals rather than the need to advance human development. In the process of attaining economic growth, the social development of people and particularly of women has often been neglected.

Set women's economic empowerment as part of macroeconomic goals

Women's integration into the economic system of developing countries is mainly at the lower end, because generally women and men are allotted different work roles. Women tend to be confined to menial, low-skilled, low-status and poorly paid jobs while men usually have jobs with higher status and pay. Women dominate in unpaid domestic work and subsistence food production while men dominate in waged employment and

cash crop production. Women need to be afforded opportunities through education and training programmes, access to credit and land and other opportunities so that they can become equal participants in mainstream economic activity at all levels.

Women's position should also be considered as a critical part of the labour market when macroeconomic targets are set for economic growth. The manner in which capital intensive and technologically advanced industry affects labour mobility and conditions should be assessed from a gender perspective so that women do not become a cheap alternative within competitive markets. The economic and social wage (social security benefits, training, etc.) should be reviewed to ensure equity between male and female workers. The negative effects of globalisation on labour markets should be examined to prevent new forms of women's exploitation in the workplace and other economic activities.

In some regions it has been found that, when women's labour and what it contributes at the household and project levels are overlooked, when their need for economic incentives are not understood and resources relevant to their productive work are directed to men, development policies and projects fail to meet their goals. Despite this, governments have not, for the most part, realigned development policies or altered the design of major economic projects so as to support women's productive work and therefore strengthen their contribution to national productivity goals.

Accord value to women's work

The general opinion is that it is difficult to place a value on the time women spend in social reproduction¹ and to translate this value into easily quantifiable data to measure their contribution to the economy. While this may be a technical problem it should not prevent planners and statisticians from formally recognising and acknowledging the social value of women's work and its economic contribution. The manner in which national accounting systems assess and monitor the value of women's work within the household, in the formal economy and at community levels, is critical. In the view of many scholars and activists, until women's contribution to the economy is recognised and valued, any allocations made to address women's positions will be seen as 'soft money' contributing to social consumption and not to growth and economic development.

Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and academic institutions together with women's movements are increasingly pushing for this recognition because current indices of economic growth and national assets/accounts do not reflect women's contributions.

If this is done, it is more likely that planners will begin to see the importance of supporting women by providing better access to resources, services and benefits to maximise their use of time and resources, thus releasing them from the burden of carrying an unequally heavy responsibility.

Use appropriate sex-disaggregated data

Sex-disaggregated data and the building-up of an accurate database of gender indices of development is vital to effective planning. India, for example, has been able to develop a national human development report with a human development index and gender development index for each state.

While some of the information/data used may not be totally reliable it does provide a basis on which to build. This type of data is crucial to development planning, especially in ensuring that gender development indices are linked to gender empowerment measures.

Analyse the impact of economic structural adjustment programmes

Numerous developing countries have recently been through rigorous economic structural adjustment programmes (ESAPs) as part of internal stabilisation and adjustment processes. The International Monetary Fund and World Bank were centrally involved in ESAPs to get countries to meet their debt obligations. However, the social effects of ESAPs – particularly their effects on women – were not factored into the process. The processes used to implement ESAPs were not open, transparent or participatory, and were determined largely by technical experts (economists) engaging in a number-crunching exercise.

ESAPs contributed to increasing poverty among women and a social crisis in terms of health, education, social services and food security in many developing countries. This has led to a distrust of foreign intervention in domestic policy developments. The social costs of economic structural adjustment programmes need to be analysed and measures taken to reverse their negative impact.

A critical gender analysis of the root causes of social problems is essential

Gender roles, responsibilities and the gender division of labour are seldom analysed within the development planning process. Development planners tend to operate on the assumption that issues of poverty, race, ethnicity, class, and urban/rural disparities should be addressed before gender inequalities. This critical problem arises from the lack of analysis on the extent to which gender inequalities are embedded in other structural inequalities in society. Analyses of poverty and race/ethnicity should include a gender perspective.

The solution to women's problems is usually seen in isolation from all other processes that take place in society and is assumed to rest with women. Most development planning agencies and departments attempt to address gender inequalities by adding women's projects or components onto larger programmes and projects. These approaches are not only technically driven but also do not have a gender analysis. Indeed, often the approach is to factor women into a process which might result in change at the bottom end of the development scale in a welfare response (see Table 1) but which does little to change male/female power relations.

Furthermore, planning agencies and government sectors tend to treat the target population as passive objects or recipients of welfare benefits. In the case of women this view limits the extent to which women become active participants in the project planning processes.

Institutional Concerns

Planning tends to have a sectoral bias which results in a fragmented, compartmentalised approach and ignores cross-cutting gender needs and concerns. This problem is compounded in many countries where no single authority or agency takes the responsibility for implementing the country's overall development programme. As a result, the failure to meet the needs of women in the different sectors is not evaluated. It may be picked up in gender-aware budget reviews and examinations of the extent to which monies have been used. But without a gender-aware evaluation of the impact on expected beneficiaries, the failure to meet women's needs remains hidden.

Integrate strategic gender needs through effective co-ordination of planning cycles

Development planning should ensure that there is a link between sectoral budgetary processes and goals and national budgetary processes so that gender objectives can be integrated throughout the process. Currently, most governments' budgetary processes operate independently of sectoral programme planning. This results in programmes being planned without regard to what is financially possible. There is a lack of co-ordination between the various planning cycles in many countries.

The timing and sequencing of planning and implementation processes from the local to the national level is of key importance to the coherence and achievement of development goals. Further, most planners at national levels are more concerned with the ceilings set for public expenditure and budgetary constraints than with the need to develop integrated project plans and the optimal use of resources.

Timing and integration of planning is not just a technical process but requires sensitivity to the need for democratic decision-making, as well as the recognition that bringing women and other marginalised interest groups into planning is essential but takes longer to achieve.

Establish structures and mechanisms to advance gender equality/equity

Another difficulty within policy and decision-making structures is that promoting a gender perspective is generally left to, or becomes, the concern of a few committed individuals in a department or agency. These individuals often introduce a gender component to their projects and programmes without it being seen as a mainstream task within the entire department or agency. Their ability to provide a gender analysis and gendered policies is dependent on their own frames of reference and the extent to which this can be linked to the practical and strategic needs of women within society. This is a barrier to the institutionalisation of gender. Departments and agencies need to ensure that gender policies are as much a cornerstone of planning as are macro-economic policies and in fact should inform the macroeconomic policy framework.

Establishing effective national mechanisms for advancing gender equality and mainstreaming gender concerns into government planning requires a commitment from governments to undertake public service reform and to work in partnership with civil society organisations. Unless line departments/sectors establish structures and mechanisms to integrate gender into their policies, programmes and objectives, gender inequalities and women's needs are unlikely to be addressed, except in a welfarist, project-specific manner. Gender relations and women's position will continue to be pegged on to existing projects or operate outside of mainstream development planning processes.

The establishment of national mechanisms such as an Office on the Status of Women (as in South Africa) within governments, or a National Council of Women (as in India), needs to go hand-in-hand with civil service reform. Government departments will need to review their staffing, programmes and impact to determine whether these create the space and leverage for advancing gender equality. The Commonwealth is promoting the Gender Management System as a means of creating and maintaining the institutional arrangements required for effective gender mainstreaming.

Independent constitutionally created organs such as a Commission on Gender Equality (as for example in South Africa) will need to monitor the public, private and civil society sectors to ensure that gender equality is promoted. Monitoring all sectors is not realistic, however, unless effective partnerships are developed with key organisations.

Recruit women as well as men into the planning field

Most departments and agencies have staff with knowledge and expertise related to the sector in which they work but without a gender-aware perspective on their sector. In development planning agencies most staff are usually male, and training is orientated to technical and administrative aspects of work and fits the traditional planning mode. There is a shortage of professional women in the planning sector who have a gender analysis capability. Even in instances where women are present, like their male colleagues, they may not be gender-aware and they may experience difficulties in translating gender interests and needs into planning goals.

Where gender awareness is lacking, those who have decision-making power may be indifferent, resistant or even hostile to gendered development plans. Discussions held with women members of such agencies indicate that many of them experience antagonism and even ridicule in their attempts to address gender inequalities.

Planning agencies and departments need to analyse the roles, rights and responsibilities of women and men in government, and specifically of women, to prevent their exclusion from development planning.

Introduce gender policy/planning training into planning agencies

Gender inequality is shaped by a specific set of circumstances and derives from particular historical and social contexts and as such emerges in different forms at different periods. Planning must be located within its own social, economic and historical context to be relevant. Training is required to raise awareness of these contexts.

Ensure that systems of governance and planning are accountable, transparent and accessible

Discussions with policy-makers and technical planners in some Commonwealth countries reflect the need for development planning to be accountable, transparent and accessible. Accountability can be effected within and outside of government. In addition, ways must be found to promote partnerships with civil society to address development needs, particularly of marginalised groups.

Promote participant involvement in monitoring and evaluation

Research into development planning processes reveals that when planning commissions, units or agencies of government are asked for information on monitoring and evaluation they refer one either to the various sectors or to their annual reports. The sectors indicate considerable difficulty in monitoring and evaluating projects and in determining their gender impact.

Evaluation is usually measured in terms of output, such as in relation to numbers of people who have been served through budget allocations. The effect of programmes and the impact they have had on the extent of the problem – in this case gender inequality – is seldom evaluated.

Projects and programmes will only become culturally relevant and appropriate if the people targeted are a part of the planning process, and inform programme planners about what is culturally acceptable, gender-sensitive and likely to succeed. Poor women's perspectives need to be included in the conceptualisation of plans, as well as their monitoring and evaluation.

Public and Private Spheres

Where an attempt is made to improve the position of women, this is usually in the public sphere and does not necessarily result in changes in gender relations within the home.

Power relations in the private sphere are among a number of factors contributing to women's failure to make effective use of changes in the public sphere to advance gender equality. Currently the extent to which development programmes and projects place additional responsibilities on women as 'vehicles' of development (WID and Welfare approaches) places a tremendous burden on them. It is important to create conditions which ensure that the spaces opening up for women to participate more actively at higher levels of decision-making are matched by men taking on more of the work at the household/family and community levels. This can be facilitated through gender-aware primary, secondary, tertiary and continuing education curricula and processes.

Development processes and plans tend to reflect ethnocentric biases about the sexual division of labour at the household, community, provincial and national levels. The potential of development projects in all sectors to change ethnocentric gender stereotyping² and result in a qualitative change in male-female relations and access to economic power should be promoted.

Notes

- 1 Social reproduction means all the tasks women generally carry out in the care of children, the elderly, within the household and in the community and for which they are usually not paid.
- 2 Ethnocentric gender stereotyping refers to gender stereotypes that are specific to particular ethnic, racial or sociocultural groups.