

Forging change and avoiding pitfalls
in development projects that
“empower” women

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Outline

- Research focus on AFS WIF/GAF symposia;
- Discussion on further research areas which need to be covered and how to move the AFS gender research forward.

AFS WIF/GAF Symposia

- Papers focused mainly on:
 - descriptive discourses which provided technical and scientific information on women's roles in fisheries activities;
 - issues at the local and household level;
- The analyses rarely address how women's lives are impacted by the broader scale on-going sectoral processes;

AFS WIF/GAF Symposia

- Some work focused on empowering women without clearly defining what “empowerment” really means and entails;
- Studies tend to be influenced by the demands from donors and are planned to address complex problems using uncomplicated objectives
 - resulting in failure to achieve and quantify results within a short time frame of 3-5 years.

AFS WIF/GAF Symposia

- Studies have shown that some projects which were meant to empower women had also disadvantaged them by increasing their workload;
- Some development projects involving women may have increased the family income but women often had a say only in spending money for household necessities like food and clothing, and spending on “luxury” items like cigarettes and newspapers are decided by men.

An example of failure to empower

Aquaculture Development in Northern Uplands, Vietnam

- UNDP project implemented in 1999-2002;
- Objective: to alleviate poverty and malnutrition;
- Although project enhanced status of ethnic women somewhat, it has increased their workload;
- Total work hours of women greater than men but women have less decision making roles;
- Although women were usually responsible for managing money in the family, this did not mean that they had the right to spend as they like;
- Women made individual decisions on spending for daily meals, clothes and part of children's education;
- Other expenses were decided by the husband or both husband and wife.

Empowerment- what does it really mean?

- Due to its widespread use, “empowerment” carries different meanings when used by different people;
- Very often its use by researchers and development workers is not explicitly defined;
- Failure to define and explore the practical details of how empowerment can be achieved weakens it as a tool for strategising change (Rowlands 1997).

When are women empowered?

Measured by five components [POPIN undated]

- Women's sense of self-worth;
- Right to have and to determine choices;
- Right to have access to opportunities and resources;
- Right to have the power to control their own lives both within and outside their home;
- Ability to influence the direction of social change to create a more just social and economic order, nationally and internationally.

Power categories and their implications in practice (Oxaal and Baden 1997)

Understanding of power	Implications in practice
Power over	Conflict and direct confrontation between powerful and powerless interest groups
Power to	Capacity building, supporting individual decision-making, leadership etc
Power with	Social mobilization, building alliances and conditions
Power within	Increasing self-esteem, awareness or consciousness raising, confidence building

“Power over”

Three dimensions of “power over”

1. A has power over B to the extent that he or she can get B to do something that B would otherwise not do;
2. Preventing certain people or issues from getting to the decision-making arena in the first place;
3. The powerful may also get their own way by manipulating the consciousness of the less powerful so as to make them incapable of seeing that a conflict exists.

“Power over”

- Zero sum - the more power one person has, the less the other has;
- Seen at many levels - from household to national or international policy making;
- Empowerment in the development context often constructed as the “power over” context and that women should be empowered to participate within the economic and political structure of society;
- Example: women gaining increased control over income from loans, savings and household production.

“Power to”

- Power to: power which increases the boundaries of what is possible for one person without necessarily limiting somebody else;
- Focus on power to has led to an emphasis to decision making;
- Example: providing training to women to increase their access to income and microfinance.

“Power with”

- Power with: refers to collective action recognising that more can be achieved by a group together than by individuals alone;
- Power with stresses the way in which gaining power actually strengthens the power of others rather than diminishing it;
- Example: International women’s group collectively challenge discrimination.

“Power within”

- Power within: increased individual consciousness by increasing self-esteem, awareness or consciousness raising, confidence building;
- Example: desire by women for equal rights to resources.

Longwe's (2002) framework for the empowerment of women

- Welfare
- Access
- Conscientisation
- Mobilisation
- Control

Longwe's framework of empowerment

Welfare:

- Lowest level of intervention which may close a gender gap;
- Women are given benefits to improve their socio-economic status rather than acquiring such benefits for themselves.

Longwe's framework cont'd

Access:

- Women improve their own status by their own work arising from increased access to resources.

Conscientisation

- Concerned with a collective urge to action to remove one or more of the discriminatory practices that impede women's access to resources;
- Leadership of more liberated and activist women is essential at this critical phase of fomenting dissatisfaction with the established patriarchal order.

Longwe's framework cont'd.

Mobilisation:

- Action level that complements conscientisation;
- Involves women coming together for the recognition and analysis of problems.

Control

- Women have taken action so that there is gender equality in decision-making and have taken over access to resources.

Summary

- Empowerment of women requires researchers and planners to clearly define and understand the process of empowerment and what it entails ;
- For many women in the coastal communities in Asia, awareness building and education are critical to help women overcome internalised oppression which had made them accept discrimination as natural.

Summary

- Need to broaden our scope to not only address small-scale individual process of economic empowerment but also to study how the broader scale ongoing sectoral processes (such as globalisation, global warming) impact women in small scale fisheries and how we can provide solutions;
- Researchers in the GAF network have not worked closely with those in the feminist movements and are influenced more by mainstream fisheries and aquaculture development views where empowerment is seen as an individual process of economic empowerment rather than a collective process to challenge power structures;

Summary

- For real change to happen, feminist activities should be at the core of the empowerment process.
- *“To empower women to critically and creatively reshape their worlds, women’s own concept of themselves has to be decoded and re-inscribed. Instead of disassociating any gender project from feminism, such programs should instead be made as “feminist” as possible” (Wieringa 1994).*

References

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References

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