

Development projects involving women in the fisheries sector in Asia: are we empowering them or creating beasts of burden?

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Development after WWII

- Early initiatives directed at addressing inequities between developed and developing nations;
- Focused on men and projects failed;
- Boserup (1970) traced failures to women's exclusion;
- Following this report, women professionals started pressuring governments to integrate women into development projects.

Women in development

- Many projects failed to empower women;
- In many cases, work burden increased and well being suffered.

Failure to empower- 1

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 hrs 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.

Failure to empower-2

Patuakhali Barguna Aquaculture Project, Bangladesh

- Funded by DANIDA, implemented from 1997-2004;
- Project placed additional work burden on women who were already stretched to the limits;
- Women were confused on how to organize their time between domestic chores and work in aquaculture projects;
- Women usually had to do everything related to fish farming activities within their households and also responsible for maintaining vegetable plots and raising livestock.

Failure to empower- 3

- Women play major role in raising fish in ponds and cages in the vicinity of their home especially in northern Thailand;
- Women left with the sole responsibility of looking after the ponds and cages when men migrate to cities to work;
- Such duties require constant attention and make it difficult for women to participate in off-farm activities;
- Women complained that they have less time for leisure - watching TV, reading newspapers.

Failure to empower 4

SUFER Project, Bangladesh

- Funded by DFID;
- Time spent on project work:
 - >7 hrs: 10.4%
 - 5- 7 hrs: 7.5%
 - 2-4 hrs: 43.3%
 - <2 hrs: 34.3%
 - Shortage of drinking water and fuel wood also added to their work burden.

Women's Work Burden

- In Mongolia even when women took on men's work, traditional work divisions still remained women's work;
- Vietnamese men and women spent nearly the same amount of time on income-generating activities, but women spent almost twice as much time as men on household work;
- Agricultural communities in Ivory coast, in a day women worked 2.9 hrs more than men.

Reasons for failure

- Projects that are solely driven by economic reasons may not benefit women and improve their situation and wellbeing.

Beasts of Burden

- Women's work burden came under greater scrutiny because many development projects have involuntarily increased women's workload without distributing benefits equally between women and men.

Why development projects failed

- Projects driven solely by development reasons may not benefit and empower women;
- Communication gap: gender advocates see issues as part of social equality agenda while policy makers view development as chiefly concerning economic productivity;
- Gender planners have preferences for simplified tools and quantifiable targets within a short timeframe of 3-5 years.

Gender Planning

What should be incorporated?

- Involve planners or their consultants as well as women targeted;
- Fundamental questions relating to women's gender interest must be asked when planning development related to women;
- Take into account the critical, contextualized analysis of women's oppression, and design policies to diminish the oppression.

Gender Planning

- Development activities that increased women's workload without any proportionate improvement in their situations should be avoided;
- Development activities that alleviate women's work burden and technology that saves labor in domestic chores should be given high priority;
- Reduction in domestic chores should be concurrent with increased opportunities to improve women's productive work.

Gender Planning

Empowerment and Gender Equity

- Strategies to empower women must focus beyond economic restructuring to a restructuring of social relations which constrain women;
- Empowerment should emphasize on:
 - Labor markets- equal wages with men, access to all sectors;
 - Social development- provision of basic needs, health, education;
 - Relation within household- time use, work distribution.

Gender Planning

- Need to enhance women's self reliance and internal strength to enable them to determine their choices in life and to influence the direction of change, through their ability to gain control over crucial material and non-material resources;
- Rethink strategies: male-biased to human-centered development. Involves not only the transformation of the reproductive economy to facilitate women's participation in the production economy but also a transformation of the productive economy to recognize the community and family responsibilities of both men and women.

Tools for assessing women empowerment

- No rigorous tools have been developed and a single indicator insufficient to measure even a specific dimension of empowerment;
- Empowerment is a process- as a moving target it is difficult to measure;
- Frequently measured at one of three levels:
 - Household level;
 - Aggregate level;
 - Intermediate level.

Household level

- Most commonly measured level;
- Commonly used indicators:
 - Domestic decision making;
 - Access to or control of resources;
 - Mobility or freedom of movement;

Household level

Less commonly used indicators:

- Economic contribution to household;
- Freedom from violence;
- Management/knowledge;
- Public space;
- Marriage/kin/social support;
- Couple interaction;
- Appreciation in household.

Aggregate level

- Less well developed, less sophisticated and rely heavily on proxy measures;
- Indicators used:
 - Labor market;
 - Education;
 - Marriage/kinship system;
 - Social norms/practice;
 - Health/survival;
 - Political and legal entities;
 - Ratio of GDI and HDI.

Intermediate level

- Most significant gaps in efforts to measure empowerment at the level intermediate between the individual/household and the district/state/nation;
- For example, assessment is lacking on how women in specific communities may be empowered through shifts in norms, marriage systems and political processes.

Discussion and Conclusion

- Researchers tend to focus only on a narrow scope of an enormously complex issue;
- They tend to be influenced by the demand from donors and plan their research to address complex problems with simple tools within a short study period of 3-5 years and with quantifiable targets;
- Inadequate gender sex-disaggregated data provides an inadequate basis of development planning;

Discussion and Conclusion

- To empower women to critically and creatively reshape their worlds, women's own concept of themselves has to be de-coded and re-inscribed;
- Researchers are probably more influenced by the mainstream development view where empowerment is seen as an individual rather than collective process with emphasis on entrepreneurship and self-reliance rather than co-operation to challenge power structures;

Discussion and Conclusion

- The feminist process of identity and collective self should be at the core of the empowerment process where the construction of a collective self of women who see themselves as vocal objects able to define and defend their gender interest;
- More interaction among the various groups – researchers, gender specialists, feminists and development planners are necessary to achieve empowerment.