

**This document is an excerpt from:**

ILO International Training Centre, Module on Gender, Poverty and Employment

### **“Bringing” Women into the Picture: the Women in Development (WID) Approach**

Although the principle of equality of men and women was recognized in both the UN Charter in 1945 and the UN Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, the majority of development planners and workers did not fully address women's position in the development process until the 1970s.

In the 1960s and 1970s the focus of development was largely on economic growth measured by GDP. This period was characterized by rapid technological development and by the achievement of full employment in industrialized countries. The underlying assumption was that what would benefit one sector of society (e.g. male workers) would trickle down to the other (e.g. dependents/relations of male workers).

The term "women in development" (WID) arose within this context in the early 1970s, when it was argued that 'modernization' was impacting differently on men and women. Instead of improving women's lives, some development projects appeared to be contributing to a deterioration of the relative position of women.

The emergence of the WID approach owes much to the work of the economist Ester Boserup, whose landmark study "Women's role in Economic Development" (Boserup, 1970) argued that women's contributions to development were being ignored and development suffered as a result. Boserup examined women's participation in agricultural work, male and female farming systems in Africa and the negative impact of some interventions on women, for instance the introduction of new technologies in farming. In fact, she argued that development programmes tended to leave many women worse off, typically with a heavier burden of labour, but little in the way of benefits. Boserup's study was the first study that challenged the assumptions of a 'welfare approach' and highlighted women's importance to the agricultural economy. This led to a growing concern about perceptions of women's lower status compared to men.

The WID approach viewed women's disadvantage as a consequence of their exclusion from development. Difference in status and power between men and women was explained in terms of economic contributions, and women's subordination was often seen as a result of their exclusion from the marketplace. The WID movement focused on how women should be considered more fully in their productive sphere. WID strategies tended to advocate for women's projects or project components, increasing women's income and productivity, and improving women's ability to look after the household so they could have more time for 'productive' work. The overall goal of WID was the integration of women into existing development processes.

WID strategies often found a great deal of resistance amongst national governments and development agencies. The United Nations played a crucial role in providing for a platform for discussion and debate. The International Conferences held during the United Nations Decade for Women (Mexico 1975, Copenhagen 1980 and Nairobi 1985) greatly contributed to the institutionalization of WID within both the UN system and, more generally, the international development agenda.

Throughout this decade, along with the flourishing literature and research work, the limitations of the WID approach also started to emerge. In general, it was argued that the WID approach did not address the root causes of discrimination that prevented women's full participation in their society.

The claim to “bring” women into development appeared highly contradictory, as women were already involved in the world of work and in all the activities related to the development process; only, they were not involved on equal terms. Focusing on increasing women's participation in such activities without

addressing the structural inequalities that characterized them, would ultimately perpetuate and reinforce such inequalities.

The WID approach failed to acknowledge the existence and the impact of power relations between the sexes on women's availability of resources. It treated women as an 'isolated', separate and homogeneous category, immune from external influence and internal differentiation, overlooking the important fact that women might have different needs according to their social status, to their marital status, their age, their health condition etc. Inappropriate targeting in women-specific projects and programmes, may have resulted in a temporary relief to a specific problem, but not in a long-term structural change.

### **“Spotting” Women in the Picture: The Gender and Development (GAD) Approach**

The Gender and Development (GAD) approach emerged in the 1980s in response to the critiques outlined above. Although an analysis of women's subordination was at the heart of the WID approach, the essentially relational nature of their subordination had been left largely unexplored. WID identified women's lack of access to resources as the key to their subordination, but it did not examine how gender relations play in restricting women's access in the first place.

The essentially relational nature of “gender” turns it into a powerful analytical tool: by encompassing the interaction between women and men in all aspects of life, it acknowledges its underlying power component and the important distinction between biological and social differences. Instead of just considering women and women's condition in specific sectors (e.g. women and education, women and labor, women and poverty), the concept of gender can be applied to analyse how gender relations may affect a specific situation or impact on the planning a development action.

Wearing a 'gender lens' means always keeping in mind the very simple assumption that the population involved in any analysis – stakeholders, beneficiaries, service users, citizens, and “the poor” – consists of both men and women (and boys and girls), and that, given the existing social and biological differences, every action will affect them in different ways.

The GAD approach therefore implies first of all a gender-disaggregated analysis of development-related issues, one that takes into account the gender, power and social relations characterizing a particular society or situation. Adopting such mind frame offers a chance to tackle the root causes of gender inequality, bringing to the surface the structural factors of discrimination, social and cultural forces that a WID approach was not equipped to detect.

There are a number of practical tools and strategies for the implementation of a GAD approach, the most important being Gender Analysis, Gender Mainstreaming and the concept of empowerment. Such tools will be outlined in details in the next section, but first let us take a quick look at a few examples of how this major shift from 'women' to 'gender' affected in practice the international development agenda.

### **Gender Mainstreaming**

The concept of Gender Mainstreaming was officially introduced as a global strategy during the 1995 Beijing Conference, in response to the necessity of incorporating a gender perspective into all development sectors. Since then, it has been widely accepted as one of the main strategies for the achievement of gender equality, even though there is often much confusion about its nature and purpose.

### **Gender Mainstreaming – a UN Definition**

“Mainstreaming a gender perspective is the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in all areas and at all levels. It is a strategy for making women's as well as men's concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the

design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated”.

Gender mainstreaming is therefore not a goal in itself; rather, it is a strategy for the achievement of gender equality. It is not about adding on a ‘women’s component’, or even a ‘gender equality component’, to an existing activity, and it involves more than increasing women’s participation. The underlying assumption is that gender inequalities are deeply embedded in the cultural and socio-economic texture of society, and that every field and area subject to legislations, policies, programmes and any kind of planned action contain a gender dimension that needs to be taken into consideration. These includes sectors where gender disparities are more visible, such as education, health and welfare provision, but also sectors where gender differences are more ‘hidden’, such as macro-economics, urban planning, private and public budgeting etc.

Furthermore, the issue of gender equality needs to be addressed at all stages of the project or programme cycle, i.e. at the planning and design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation stages. Gender mainstreaming provides that the potential roles and concerns of both men and women are taken into consideration in programmes and policies, together with an analysis of how such planned actions might affect them differently. This provision, nevertheless, is often misunderstood and interpreted as though the respect for the principle of non-discrimination was sufficient to ensure gender equality through a certain policy or legislation. This is not always true: a policy that is not overtly discriminatory towards either sex – which is therefore ‘gender-neutral’ – does not necessarily guarantee equal benefits and outcomes for both sexes. Gender Mainstreaming does not imply that planned actions should be gender-neutral: rather, it aims at making them gender-sensitive, or even “gendertransformative”.

As we discussed earlier on, equal treatment does not necessarily lead to equal outcomes, and treating everybody in the same way when significant inequalities already exist might ultimately reinforce and deepen such inequalities. Gender mainstreaming is a long-term strategy that tackles the root causes of existing gender disparities, in order to prevent inequalities to be systematically reiterated. Nevertheless, gender mainstreaming is not sufficient to address existing inequalities in the short-term: as we have seen, women are found in a disadvantaged position in many dimensions of public and private life, and addressing contingent inequalities is fundamental for the effectiveness of any gender mainstreaming strategy. This is why **gender-specific measures** aimed at advancing women’s position in society are also necessary, until women will be able to participate in – and benefit from – development in full and equal partnership with men.

Needs analysis is a necessary step when identifying appropriate strategies for the promotion of gender equality. The distinction – which originated within the critique to WID approaches – between practical and strategic needs might help clarifying the need to adopt a two-pronged approach to gender equality promotion. Women’s practical needs are usually derived from existing gender roles within their society – primarily as mothers and homemakers – and refer to inappropriate living and working conditions in terms of food, shelter, health and employment. Their strategic needs, on the other hand, refer more broadly to their subordinate position in society and to longer-term necessities for the elimination of the inequalities that also generate their practical needs. For example, making it easier for a woman to find a job may meet her practical need for income; however, if there is no associated change in the gender division of labour, the burden of domestic work will still hinder her capability to engage in paid employment. Therefore, when designing policies and programmes, it is important to consider immediate practical needs, to address existing inequalities in the specific context, within a longer-term strategic perspective, to tackle the very causes of such inequalities. This distinction, which has emerged as the foundation of the Gender and Development (GAD) approach, is very useful for the purpose of gender mainstreaming, as both practical and strategic needs should be taken into consideration for an effective strategy towards gender equality.

## **Tools for Gender Mainstreaming**

There are numerous tools, practices and operational approaches that can be used for bringing gender issues into the mainstream of all policies and programmes.

### **Gender Analysis**

The term 'gender analysis' is used to describe a systematic approach to examining factors related to gender. It involves a deliberate effort to identify and understand the different roles, relations, situations, resources, benefits, constraints, needs and interests of men and women in a given socio-cultural context.

Metaphorically, gender analysis involves wearing a 'gender lens' in order to view the given context from the perspective of both women and men. For example a gender analysis of employment patterns in any country would illustrate labour force participation rates, a sex difference in paid employment, differential wage in paid work, occupational segregations, an unequal share between women and men in unpaid family work, as well as an unequal share in part-time employment and in informal employment.

Gender analysis is also aimed at providing detailed information about the gender practical and strategic needs of men and women in the given community. It attempts to answer agency-related questions, such as who does or uses what, how and why. The objective is to better understand what women and men do, what resources and constraints they have, and what their needs and priorities are so that concrete measures for the promotion of equality of opportunity and treatment between men and women workers can be implemented.

There exist different frameworks for conducting gender analysis, that can be used according to the context and the purpose of the analysis.

In general, a good gender analysis should include:

- collecting data which are disaggregated, i.e. broken down by sex,
- identifying gender differentials at work and in life, in terms of the division of labour, and access to and control over resources and benefits,
- understanding girls' boys', women's and men's needs, constraints and opportunities in relation to knowledge and skills needed, conditions of work, social protection, family responsibilities, and economic and political decision-making,
- identifying constraints and opportunities in the larger environment (laws, attitudes),
- reviewing the capacities of existing institutions and mechanisms to reach out equally to girls, boys, women and men, and to promote gender equality<sup>18</sup>.

### **Gender-specific Actions and equal Opportunities Policies**

As we mentioned earlier, gender-specific actions may be needed to address existing inequalities in a given context. Whenever girls or women, boys and men are found in a disadvantaged position, it may be necessary to plan policies and interventions specifically aimed at improving their condition. Earlier on in the module, we outlined the Women and Development (WID) approach compared to the Gender and Development (GAD) approach, and we mentioned how their distinction is not always clear-cut and how they are both valid depending on the situation. Some women-specific actions, in fact, fall under the WID category, even though they are implemented within the wider framework of a GAD approach.

**Women-specific activities** are interventions specifically targeted at girls and women whenever cultural norms and values influence women's participation in certain activities. For example, in the employment field, such activities may involve:

- sectors, industries and occupations where many girls and women are found in prevalence (for example, agricultural and informal sector work, home work, domestic work, prostitution, leather and garments industries),
- sectors where girls and women are virtually absent (male-dominated industries and occupations or executive levels).

In the field of education and training, women-specific actions may be appropriate when women have average lower levels of education compared to men, or when specific skills trainings are required for them to participate in activities in equal partnership with men. Furthermore, women specific actions may also involve concerns related to their reproductive role in terms of health and social protection (teenage pregnancies, reproductive health, maternity protection, etc.).

**Men-specific activities** are also an important – even though often overlooked – possibility, as inputs from both women and men are necessary to achieve the full partnership that is necessary for the achievement of gender equality. Raising men's awareness about gender issues and implications is particularly important, as it is often men holding power and authority within organizations and institutions and their commitment towards the eradication of gender disparities becomes fundamental.

**Positive or affirmative actions**, sometimes also referred to as positive discrimination, are another type of gender-specific interventions. They are necessary temporary measures designed to eliminate or prevent direct and

indirect discrimination or to compensate for existing disadvantages. Generally, they consist of establishing targets or reserving quotas to an underrepresented group to generate equal participation in certain activities. This may be applied to smaller or larger scale projects and programmes in the field of education, employment or political participation. Quotas may be established in party lists for political elections, in formal education and training programmes, and in private and public organizational structures.

*Reference:*

*E. Boserup (1970). Women's role in economic development, St. Martin's Press*