



Gender and Development

Janet Henshall Momsen



Routledge Perspectives on Development

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Gender and Development

Since the classic *Women and Development in the Third World* was published over a decade ago, a new awareness of the importance of gender roles in development has grown. Globalization, international migration, refugees and conditions of war have brought these issues of gender and development to the public attention. At the same time, gender perspectives have become central to the many United Nations meetings on development, including the Beijing Women's Conference.

Gender and Development focuses on these new challenges and the efforts to overcome them through the empowerment of women and men. Individual chapters look at reproduction and health, including the HIV/AIDS epidemic; globalization and issues of production, including new areas of employment such as IT; and environmental topics such as gendered access to resources and ecofeminism. The role of the UN and changes in development organizations' attitudes, through gender mainstreaming, are also considered.

This accessible textbook provides an introduction to the topic that is based on the author's wide field experience. Topical and up-to-date information and analysis are used throughout. It contains a wealth of student-friendly features, including boxed case studies drawn from around the world, encompassing the transition countries of Eastern and Central Europe and the Central Asian Republics, as well as Africa, the Caribbean, Latin America and Asia. There are also chapter learning objectives, discussion questions, annotated guides to further reading and websites, diagrams and tables, and numerous maps and photographs.

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1

Introduction: gender is a development issue

Learning objectives

When you have finished reading this chapter, you should be able to:

- **understand flexible gender identities and roles**
- **appreciate the gender impact of sudden economic change**
- **be aware of different approaches to gender and development**
- **be familiar with the basic spatial patterns of gender and development.**

The development process affects women and men in different ways. The after effects of colonialism, and the peripheral position of poor countries of the South and those with economies in transition in today's globalizing world, exacerbate the effects of discrimination on women. The penetration of capitalism, leading to the modernization and restructuring of subsistence and centrally planned economies, often increases the gender-based disadvantages. The modern sector takes over many of the economic activities, such as food processing and making of clothes, which had long been the means by which women supported themselves and their families. But by relieving them of these time consuming chores it gives them the freedom to find other, perhaps better, sources of earned income. Yet a majority of the better-paid jobs involving new technology go to men, but male income is less likely to be spent on the family.

Modernization of agriculture has altered the division of labour between the sexes, increasing women's dependent status as well as

their workload. Women often lose control over resources such as land and are generally excluded from access to improved agricultural methods. Male mobility is higher than female, both between places and between jobs, and more women are being left alone to support children. In some countries, especially in the Middle East, South Asia and Latin America, women cannot do paid work or travel without their husband's or father's written permission. Women carry a double or even triple burden of work as they cope with housework, childcare and subsistence food production, in addition to an expanding involvement in paid employment. Everywhere women work longer hours than men. The pressure on gender relations of the changing status of women, and of rapid economic restructuring combined with growing impoverishment at the household level for many, is crucial to the success or failure of development policies.

Gender (the socially acquired notions of masculinity and femininity by which women and men are identified) is a widely used and often misunderstood term. It is sometimes conflated with sex or used to refer only to women. Gender identities, because they are socially acquired and based on nurture, vary. In Polynesia gender identities are often flexible. In families without daughters, one son is selected when very young to be raised as a girl to fulfil the family's needs for someone to undertake a daughter's roles, such as care of siblings and housework. As adults, these individuals usually continue to live and dress as women, and occupy female roles with jobs as waitresses or maids in the rapidly growing tourist industry, or even as transvestite prostitutes. Today the *faafafine* (trying to be like a lady) are also found in Melanesia and are becoming more open and in some forms more aggressive (Fairbairn-Dunlop 2002). In Western Samoa they often work as dressmakers and school teachers and may run drag queen contests and fund raisers for church groups (ibid. 2002).

Gender relations (the socially constructed form of relations between women and men) have been interrogated in terms of the way development policies change the balance of power between women and men. Gender roles (the household tasks and types of employment socially assigned to women and men) are not fixed and globally consistent and indeed become more flexible with the changes brought about by economic development. Everywhere gender is crosscut by differences in class, race, ethnicity, religion and age. The much-criticized binary division between 'Western' women and the 'Other',

between white and non-white and between colonizer and colonized is both patronizing and simplistic (Mohanty 1984). Feminists have often seen women as socially constituted as a homogeneous group on the basis of shared oppression. But in order to understand these gender relations we must interpret them within specific societies and on the basis of historical and political practice, not a priori on gender. Different places and societies have different practices and it is necessary to be cognizant of this heterogeneity within a certain global homogeneity of gender roles. At the same time we need to be aware of different voices and to give them agency. The subaltern voice is hard to hear but by presenting experiences from fieldwork I have tried to incorporate it. The voices of educated women and men of the South can interpret postcoloniality but because they write in the colonizers' languages their voices have to be listened to on several levels. By combining an appreciation of different places and different voices we can arrive at an understanding of how the process of economic change in the South and in the post-communist countries is impacting people and communities (Kinnaird and Momsen 1993).

Clearly, the roles of men and women in different places show great variation: most clerks in Martinique are women but this is not so in Madras, just as women make up the vast majority of domestic servants in Lima but not in Lagos. Nearly 90 per cent of sales workers in Accra are women but in Algeria they are almost all men (Plates 1.1 and 1.2). In every country the jobs done predominantly by women are the least well paid and have the lowest status. In the countries of Eastern and Central Europe, Russia and China, where most jobs were open to men and women under communism, the transition to capitalism has led to increased unemployment, especially for women, except in Hungary, where the particular character of gendered education and employment resulted in more men's jobs being lost. In most parts of the world the gender gap in political representation has become smaller but in the former USSR and its satellite countries in Eastern and Central Europe there has been a rapid decline in average female representation in parliament from 27 per cent in 1987 under communism, to 7 per cent in 1994 (United Nations 1995b). This has been most marked in Romania, where the figures were 34 per cent in 1987 and 4 per cent in 1994 (United Nations 1995b) rising to 5.6 per cent in 2000 (Elson 2000). The relationship between development and the spatial patterns of the gender gap provides the main theme of this book.