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From WID to GAD: Conceptual Shifts in the Women and Development Discourse

Shahrashoub Razavi
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United Nations Research Institute for Social Development
United Nations Development Programme

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Preface

The Fourth World Conference on Women, to be held in Beijing in September 1995, provides an opportunity for the world community to focus attention on areas of critical concern for women worldwide — concerns that stem from social problems embracing both men and women, and that require solutions affecting both genders. One of the main objectives of the Conference is to adopt a platform for action, concentrating on some of the key areas identified as obstacles to the advancement of women. UNRISD's work in preparation for the Fourth World Conference on Women focuses on two of the themes highlighted by the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women:

- inequality in women's access to and participation in the definition of economic structures and policies and the productive process itself; and
- insufficient institutional mechanisms to promote the advancement of women.

The Institute's Occasional Paper series for Beijing reflects work carried out under the UNRISD/UNDP project, **Technical Co-operation and Women's Lives: Integrating Gender into Development Policy**. The activities of the project include an assessment of efforts by a selected number of donor agencies and governments to integrate gender issues into their activities; the action-oriented part of the project involves pilot studies in Bangladesh, Jamaica, Morocco, Uganda and Viet Nam, the goal of which is to initiate a policy dialogue between gender researchers, policy makers and activists aimed at making economic policies and productive processes more accountable to women.

This paper, the first in the series, provides an introduction to "women and development" by tracing the main trends in the way women's issues have been conceptualized in the development context. Part I of the paper explains the emergence of women in development (WID) in the early 1970s, highlighting in particular a dominant strand of thinking within WID that sought to make women's issues relevant to development by showing the positive synergies between investing in women and reaping benefits in terms of economic growth. Even though making efficiency-based arguments proved to be effective as a political strategy for having women's issues taken up by donor agencies, it also entailed a number of controversial outcomes. An undue emphasis was placed on what women could contribute to development (at times based on exaggerated claims), while their demands from development for gender equity became secondary and conditional upon showing positive growth synergies.

Part II of the paper looks at the analytical and intellectual underpinnings of the shift from WID to GAD (gender and development). Gender is being used by researchers and practitioners in a number of different ways. The theoretical underpinnings and policy implications of two prominent frameworks for gender analysis (and training) — the "gender

roles framework” and “social relations analysis” — are discussed at some length. These frameworks are then linked to two relatively recent sets of literature on gender: the first on gender and efficiency at the macro-economic level, which shares several premises with the gender roles framework, and the second on women’s empowerment strategies, which can be seen as the action-oriented outgrowth of social relations analysis.

The authors highlight two main tensions that emerge from the different conceptualizations of gender. First, at the analytical level, there are critical differences in the extent to which the “togetherness” or “social connectedness” of husband and wife is given analytical weight; a pervasive feature of (predominantly neo-classical) economic models of gender is to use analogies from elsewhere in the economic repertoire, which tend to miss some important dimensions of togetherness characteristic of husband/wife relations. Second, at the political level, the extent to which the goal of “gender-aware” development is to be linked to “top-down” or “bottom-up” strategies remains controversial. While women’s NGOs and grassroots organizations have an important role to play in creating space for women to politicize their demands, there are serious limits to what institutions of civil society can achieve. The state still remains responsible for regulating macro-level forces in a more gender-equitable manner. It is with this point in mind that the possible points of convergence between top-down and bottom-up strategies can be explored by women and development advocates.

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February 1995

Dharam Ghai
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Abbreviations & Acronyms

DAWN	Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era
GAD	gender and development
ILO	International Labour Organisation
NGO	non-governmental organization
NHE	new household economics
SAP	structural adjustment programme
SEWA	Self-Employed Women's Association
UNCTAD	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNIFEM	United Nations Development Fund for Women
WID	women in development

Introduction¹

This paper sets out some of the main trends in the way women's issues have been conceptualized in the context of development over the past two decades. It begins with a discussion of the early WID (Women in Development) approach, highlighting in particular a dominant strand in WID thought that legitimated efforts to influence development policy with a combined argument for equity and economic efficiency. The emphasis on women's productive contributions, it was hoped, would convince planners to alter development practice so as to direct scarce economic resources to women. Although women's equity demands were thereby made "relevant" to the concerns of development planners and policy makers, the strategy also entailed a more controversial implication, one that prioritized what development needs from women over what women need from development. But WID produced more than just a political strategy; it also generated new research, including analytical evaluations of the impact on rural women of development projects.

The second part of the paper examines the shift in policy discourse from WID to GAD (Gender and Development). Gender, we argue, is being used in a number of different ways. Although the analyses of gender considered in this paper share some fundamental assumptions, there are also a number of significant points at which they diverge. One of the main tensions that emerges from our comparative account is the extent to which the "social connectedness" or "togetherness" of husband and wife are given analytical weight in analyses of gender relations. According to some accounts, the interrelations between men and women have conflictual **and** co-operative dimensions that must be taken into consideration if a "gender-aware" approach to development is to be realized.

The historical account set out in this paper illustrates some continuities in thinking on women/gender and development that link the early WID arguments of the 1970s to the analyses of gender and structural adjustment put forward by a number of neo-classical economists in recent years. The paper also refers to the emergence of a strong strand of feminist thinking within economics that challenges the appropriation of the concept of efficiency by neo-classical economics, and broadens the discourse of efficiency to argue for human and sustainable development. The evolution in thinking has also been punctuated by a number of shifts: from a focus on women-specific projects to mainstreaming women/gender at the programme and policy level; and more significantly, from a reliance on top-down planning to a growing emphasis on "bottom-up" or "participatory" development strategies signifying the growing politicization of the development agenda.

The reader should be aware that the discourses under scrutiny have emerged within specific political and institutional contexts: they are, for the most part, addressed to policy makers in state and donor agency bureaucracies. They seek, in their own way, to change the world, and that very often means using discourses that will inevitably look over-

simplified: campaigning for practical action often requires a bolder and simpler discourse than the complexities of empirical research. And yet there needs to be some continuity between the discourses that are used by academics, advocates and practitioners. It is with this latter point in mind that we make our way through the different texts described in the paper.²

PART I

Women in Development (WID)

In popular discourse, “Women in Development” (WID) is associated with the wide range of activities concerning women in the development domain, which donor agencies, governments and NGOs have become involved in since the 1970s. The 1975 World Conference of the International Women’s Year at Mexico City, and the United Nations Decade for Women (1976-1985), gave expression to the major preoccupations of women around the world: improved educational and employment opportunities; equality in political and social participation; and increased health and welfare services. In sum, the WID movement that emerged during this period demanded social justice and equity for women.

In this section we focus on a dominant strand of thinking within WID discourse, one that has attempted to make a connection between equity issues and development concerns. Instead of approaching policy makers with a range of demands for women, these WID advocates have adopted a strategy of “relevance”. In other words, their demands for the allocation of development resources to women hinge on economic efficiency arguments about what women can contribute to the development process. The convergence of equity and efficiency concerns in this strand of WID thought has provided the basis for a powerful political strategy. It has also had a lasting impact on the way in which development planners think about women. In the discussion that follows, we concentrate primarily on this strand of WID thought. However, where appropriate we also refer to other policy approaches to women identified in Moser’s (1993) fivefold schema — “welfare”, “equity”, “anti-poverty”, “efficiency” and “empowerment”.

The origins of WID

The term “women in development” was coined in the early 1970s by a Washington-based network of female development professionals (Tinker, 1990:30). On the basis of their own experiences in overseas missions they began to challenge “trickle down” theories of development, arguing that modernization was impacting differently on men and women. Instead of improving women’s rights and status, the development process appeared to be contributing to a deterioration of their position.

Drawing on such evidence, women’s circles in the United States lobbied Congressional hearings, resulting in the 1973 Percy Amendment to the

US Foreign Assistance Act. Assistance granted by the United States was thereby required to help “integrate women into the national economies of foreign countries, thus improving their status and assisting the total development effort” (cited in Tinker, 1990:31).³ These Washington-based circles began to network with women working in United Nations agencies and with women academics engaged in research on women’s productive work, the sexual division of labour and the impact of development processes on women (K. Young, 1993: 25).

A major formative influence on WID was the resurgence of the women’s movement in northern countries in the 1970s. In addition to the WID agenda, there was the simultaneous effort by liberal feminists to get equal rights, employment, equity and citizenship for women in the United States — in other words, the idea of getting a just political system in place for American women. The liberal feminist approach has been very important globally, and was critical in determining the language of political strategy used by WID advocates. Central to liberal feminism was the idea that women’s disadvantages stem from stereotyped customary expectations held by men and internalized by women, and promoted through various “agencies of socialization” (Connell, 1987:34). It postulated that women’s disadvantages can, in principle, be eliminated by breaking down these stereotypes: for example by giving girls better training and more varied role models, by introducing equal opportunity programmes and anti-discrimination legislation, or by freeing labour markets (Connell, 1987:34). One implication of this approach, as many have shown, was that there was little focus on men and on power relations between men and women (see part II).

One important theme of the feminist movement in this period, especially in the United States, was equal employment opportunities for women. It is not surprising, therefore, that in turning to development issues, particular attention was paid to women’s productive labour, rather than social welfare and reproductive concerns. While these latter concerns remained central to the women’s movement in many northern countries, in turning to developing countries WID gave primacy to women’s productive roles and integration into the economy as a means of improving their status. This focus on Third World women’s productive labour was part of a strategy aimed at reformulating women’s identity for development policy. Both early colonial authorities, and post-war development agencies and NGOs, had identified women almost solely in their roles as wives and mothers, and the policies for women were restricted to social welfare concerns such as nutritional education and home economics — often referred to as the “welfare approach”. There was scant reference to the work women undertook as producers — be it for subsistence or for the market. This was the general policy environment within which WID was born, and to which it was reacting.

The second formative influence on WID was the emerging body of research on women in developing countries; here the work of the Danish economist, Ester Boserup, was most influential. From the perspective of the WID movement, the importance of Boserup’s **Women’s Role in Economic Development** (1970) was that it challenged the assumptions

of the “welfare approach” and highlighted women’s importance to the agricultural economy. Sub-Saharan Africa was characterized as the great global area of “female farming systems” in which women, using “traditional” hoe technology, assumed a substantial responsibility for food production.⁴ Moreover, Boserup posited a positive correlation between the role women played in agricultural production and their status vis-à-vis men.

Boserup’s critique of colonial and post-colonial agricultural policies was that through their productivity-enhancing interventions and dominant Western notions about what constituted “appropriate” female tasks, they had facilitated men’s monopoly over new technologies and cash crops and undermined women’s traditional roles in agriculture, thereby heralding the demise of the “female farming systems”. This, according to Boserup, was creating a dichotomy in the African countryside where men were associated with the “modern”, cash-cropping sector and women with “traditional”, subsistence agriculture. Relegated to the subsistence sector, women lost income, status and power relative to men. More importantly, their essential contribution to agricultural production became invisible.

One reason why Boserup’s work was taken up so enthusiastically by WID advocates was that “it legitimized efforts to influence development policy with a combined argument for justice and efficiency” (Tinker, 1990:30). If, as Boserup suggested, women had in the past enjoyed a position of relative equality with men in agricultural production, then it was both appropriate and feasible for development assistance directed towards women to remove inequalities. Furthermore, by suggesting that in the recent past women were not only equal in status to men, but also equally productive, Boserup challenged the conventional wisdom that women were less productive and therefore unentitled to a share of scarce development resources (Jaquette, 1990:61). Finally, the argument that African women had recently been equal to African men meant that “the claim that women should have more equal access to resources could not be dismissed as a ‘Western’ or ‘feminist’ import” (Jaquette, 1990:59).

Drawing on the insights of Boserup’s research, WID advocates rejected the narrow view of women’s roles (as mothers and wives) underlying much of development policy concerning women. In general, a great effort has been made to distinguish WID from women’s programmes carried out under the rubric of health or social welfare. Instead of characterizing women as “needy” beneficiaries, WID arguments represent women as “productive” members of society. No longer, therefore, should women be seen as passive recipients of welfare programmes but rather as active contributors to economic development. Women can thus be seen as a “missing link” in development, a hitherto undervalued economic resource in the development process (Tinker, 1990:31).

WID advocates’ emphasis on women’s productive roles meant that women’s subordination (and by implication, overcoming that subordination) was seen within an economic framework. By explaining the difference in status and power between men and women in terms of

their relative economic contributions, the origin of women's subordination was linked to their exclusion from the market-place. It was therefore argued that if women were brought into the productive sphere more fully, not only would they make a positive contribution to development, but they would also be able to improve their status vis-à-vis men.

Boserup's work provided the intellectual underpinning for WID arguments and, as we will show below, has had a lasting impact on women and development discourse.⁵ Nonetheless, Boserup's work did have its critics. Huntington (1975), for example, disagreed with Boserup's claim that women had enjoyed equal status with men in pre-colonial Africa and questioned the independence and self-sufficiency of the "female farming system".⁶ Further, she observed that if WID claims were given standing because of the acceptance of the point that women had once been equal to men in status and productivity, that standing is jeopardized by a convincing counter-argument that women have always been subjugated. Huntington's point serves as a warning that "equality should be argued on its own merits, not by creating a history of women's equality that is vulnerable to historical refutation" (Jaquette, 1990:64).

Jaquette makes a similar point: articulating WID in efficiency terms means that the impetus for the allocation of scarce resources lies in the market conception of merit, that is, that productive efficiency deserves reward. A criterion of merit based on the presumption of women's equal productivity can easily be turned against women. If it can be empirically shown that women's productivity is consistently lower than men's, then it follows that they deserve fewer resources (Jaquette, 1990:65). It is not surprising, therefore, that WID has given rise to numerous studies documenting rural women's contributions to agricultural productivity; it has also made serious attempts to include women's productive and reproductive contributions in GNP and labour statistics.

WID arguments aim to provide a rationale for directing scarce development resources to women. Building upon the work of Boserup and others, WID advocates claimed that failures to acknowledge and utilize women's productive roles within and beyond the household were planning errors leading to the inefficient use of resources (Tinker, 1990:30). This helped to legitimate a women-only focus in research and in the delivery of resources via women's projects. By improving women's access to technology and credit, women's productivity would increase and impact positively on national development. One of the underlying assumptions of WID advocates is that the costs of investing in women's productivity are justifiable in terms of **economic** returns as well as social returns.

While we will return to this subject later, it is worth noting some of the reservations that have been voiced in this context. Whitehead warns that shifting the balance of agricultural extension services and agronomic and technological research to provide improved inputs to women "will be a very costly business". Not only are current structures and budgets not set up for this purpose, it is also possible that it is intrinsically most costly to

do this for women, given their “inaccessibility” (Whitehead, 1990:464). In other words, attempts at transforming agricultural services to suit female farmers will have to be backed by strong financial and technical support.

Despite criticisms of Boserup’s research and the way in which it has been taken up by WID advocates, efficiency arguments are still central to the women and development discourse. In fact, efficiency arguments have become increasingly sophisticated in recent years and form what we refer to below as the “gender efficiency approach”. Concerns remain, however, that the emphasis on women’s productivity ignores the impact of a broad range of social divisions and social relations that constrain women’s economic choices and opportunities.

Selling WID to development agencies

The United Nations Decade for Women and its associated women’s conferences helped to institutionalize WID both within the United Nations system and at the national level. The experiences of the Decade illustrate that in attempting to have their policy goals taken up by development agencies, WID advocates found that it was more effective if demands for social justice and equity for women were strategically linked to mainstream development concerns. In other words, arguments for equity tend to be more powerful and persuasive if they are combined with the pursuit of some overarching goal from which a large majority of people may gain.

The United Nations Decade for Women played an important part in drawing attention to the role of women in the development process. Recommendations were made for the establishment of international and national machinery to promote women’s interests. During the Decade, new legislation to promote women’s rights included a number of WID-related concerns, among them the right to participate in and benefit from development. One of the most comprehensive efforts was the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (1979), which recognized women’s rights to receive training, education and extension services, as well as equal access to credit and marketing facilities, and equal treatment in agrarian reform. Although it would be folly to equate legislation (especially at the international level) with practice, the recommendations emerging from the United Nations Decade for Women provided a normative environment within which advocates could voice their demands.

The women’s conferences held during the Decade also underlined the importance of changing the sexual division of labour and the need to properly value women’s unpaid labour (K. Young, 1993:131). Nonetheless, such equity issues often received only cursory treatment because of the hostility they aroused among development experts at the international and national levels. Moser suggests that demands for gender equity (i.e., the reduction of inequalities between men and women in both public and private spheres) implicitly involved the redistribution of power (1993: 65) — a zero sum game scenario likely to meet resistance.

Buvinic also points to the threatening message of equity arguments, and suggests that development agencies did not want to “tamper with unknown and unfamiliar social variables” (1983:26). This highlights the fact that gender redistributive politics are as conflict-laden as any other redistributive issue. They are arguably more subtle in the personalized resistance they incur within bureaucracies, and complex in their confusion with cross-sex interpersonal relations (Staudt, 1990). In this context, the argument that development agencies were unwilling to adopt equity arguments for fear of “cultural imperialism” is much less convincing. As Goetz astutely comments, “such reservations ... do not apparently dampen the enthusiasm with which other development preoccupations — such as population control or lately, good governance — are taken up by development institutions” (1994a:29).

While bureaucratic resistance to gender redistributive policies may have necessitated efficiency-based arguments by WID advocates, the strategy has been problematic. As Goetz points out, “[d]emonstrating the efficiency dividends of investing in women” meant that WID advocates shifted the emphasis away from “women’s needs and interests in development, to calculating what development needs from women” (1994a:30). In other words, women as a social group are targeted by planners as a means through which prioritized development goals can be realized, which may or may not be in the direct interest of women. The anti-poverty strategies adopted by international agencies during the 1970s⁷ illustrate some of these problems.

By the late 1960s and early 1970s the development debate was giving recognition to the need for explicit pro-poor strategies in response to the supposed failure of the growth orthodoxy. Two overlapping anti-poverty approaches emerged. In the first, governments were urged to create or expand employment that could produce a sustained and considerable rise in real incomes for workers. The second was the “basic needs” strategy. According to its proponents, the primary aim of development was to meet basic human needs.⁸ In this approach, the focus was placed squarely on these ends rather than on household income. A set of selective policies, it was argued, makes it possible to satisfy the basic human needs of the whole population at levels of income per capita substantially below those required by a less discriminating strategy of overall income growth (Streeten, 1981: 37-38). A direct effort to reduce infant mortality and educate women, for example, would reduce family size and fertility rates more speedily and at lower cost than raising household incomes. In these ways the basic needs approach “economizes on the use of resources and on the time needed to satisfy basic needs” (Streeten, 1981:40).

These shifts in mainstream development thinking provided WID advocates with an opportunity to show how women could serve development. The emphasis on “poor women”, and by implication poor men, provided an opening for making the feminist agenda less threatening to male bureaucrats and programme implementers (Buvinic, 1983:26). Similarly, the focus on female-headed households as the “poorest of the poor” did not raise intrahousehold redistributive questions. In general, women’s poverty was not sufficiently linked to the

dynamics of male-female relations, thereby circumventing the need to raise intrahousehold gender redistributive issues. Another feature of WID advocacy was that it was selective in what it adopted from the dominant development paradigm, focusing for the most part on the productive work of poor women (“productive employment”), and placing less emphasis on other items on the basic needs agenda that related to welfare issues. As we have suggested above, a major preoccupation of WID advocates has been to establish women’s issues as a serious “developmental concern”, to show that women are “producers and thus participants in the process of economic growth” (Buvinic, 1983:20), and not needy beneficiaries.⁹

Although the emphasis on women’s productive roles to provide for their families’ basic needs increased women’s visibility on the development agenda, it was not carried through into the main policy documents of the period. The country reports of the International Labour Organisation (ILO), for example, recommended quite radical land reforms in Colombia, Sri Lanka and the Philippines, and extensions of existing reforms in Kenya and Iran. In all cases, however, land reform was to take place between households rather than within them, thereby failing to take intrahousehold production relations and asset ownership into account (Palmer, 1977). While in some cases granting land titles to male household heads replicated men’s pre-reform “cultivation” rights — as in Iran — in other contexts, most notably in sub-Saharan Africa, it served to undermine the usufructory rights that women had traditionally exercised by virtue of their membership in wider kinship networks.

Instead, WID demands for “productive employment” were met by donor support for small-scale income-generating activities for women. The aim of these projects was to help poor women contribute more effectively to meeting family needs by improving their capacity to earn an income through the production of marketable goods and services. Although WID advocates highlighted the importance of helping women — in their capacity as economic providers for families — to upgrade their skills and to gain access to credit, many income-generating projects “misbehaved”. In other words, their economic objectives were subverted into welfare action for women during the process of implementation (Buvinic, 1986: 653). Interventions designed to strengthen women’s productive roles were often redirected to developing women’s skills in nutrition or in traditional handicrafts. Hence, these women-only projects did little to overcome poor women’s economic marginalization.

Where women figured prominently in the new pro-poor strategy, it was in an instrumental capacity. Female education and employment, for example, were highlighted as cost-effective means of solving the population problem (the latter being a major preoccupation of the basic needs strategy). Women thereby became an important “target group”. A further outcome of this approach has been a tendency to make exaggerated and unfounded claims about women’s usefulness to development. The cure for Africa’s food crisis, child welfare, environmental degradation, and the failure of structural adjustment policies are all sought in women (more recently, in gender). While this

has given women a higher profile in policy discourse, the danger is that women are now expected to compensate for public provisions, which for a variety of reasons — among them stringent fiscal policies and mismanagement of resources — may not be forthcoming. As Kandiyoti (1988) and Goetz (1994a) have pointed out, this can mean an intensification of women's workloads as the onus shifts to them to extend their unpaid work as "feeders, healers, and teachers of children to include the provision of basic services to the community" (Goetz, 1994a:30).

The impact of WID

The impact of the early WID movement can be seen on two fronts. First, in terms of the discussions and research that it generated; and second, in the impetus it gave to the growth of institutional machineries within development agencies and governments, their mandate being to integrate women into development. As this paper focuses primarily on the conceptual and analytical approaches to women and development, very little attention has been given to the impact of the institutionalization of WID machineries within development agencies and governments. These issues will be the subject of a number of forthcoming UNRISD publications (e.g. Staudt, 1994; Goetz, 1994b). This section addresses the first point.

By highlighting women's participation in production, researchers have provided a timely challenge both to the definition of "work" (and "active labour") and to the methods of data collection used for generating official statistics (Beneria, 1981). The aim has been to make visible areas of unvalorized or non-market production that tend to be disproportionately allocated to women. An important component of this endeavour has been the attempt to deal with the much-debated category of "family labour" — which is also rendered culturally invisible by falling under the category of "housework" (Dixon-Mueller, 1985; Sharma, 1980).

Another main focus of the literature has been the evaluation of development projects designed by international development agencies to increase productivity and/or incomes.¹⁰ In many cases overt discrimination against women is revealed. For example, agricultural innovation practices and extension services failed to recognize women's role in agricultural production (Staudt, 1978). Male farmers received inputs and extension advice for crops that only women grew. Moreover, planners based their projects on a model of the household — the New Household Economics (NHE) — which contains a number of highly dubious assumptions.¹¹ As it has been time and again pointed out, assumptions about wives' availability to work on their husbands' farms are very often not borne out in reality.

One often-quoted case study of the implications of the failure to understand the complexity of intrahousehold relations and obligations is a rice irrigation project in the Gambia (Dey, 1981). The project design assumed that men were the traditional rice growers and that they had full

control over labour resources. In reality, women grew rice for household consumption and exchange within a complex system of rights and obligations between husbands and wives. Through project interventions men established exclusive rights to new land cleared for irrigation. Despite external interventions, improvements in rice production remained limited. One reason for this was that women were reluctant to perform their planned role as family labourers. Because of the particular structure of household relations in this context, husbands had to remunerate their wives with wages, presents or irrigated land in order to secure their work on the irrigated rice fields. During the wet season, women had their own rice crops to cultivate and men found it difficult to recruit women's labour.

Such case studies have illustrated that women's refusal to perform the unremunerated family labour demanded of them by many development projects has been a contributing factor to the failure of such projects. They have shown as well that there is very little provision for women's independent farming in terms of allocation of land and other resources, including access to markets. The emergence of case studies like these also signalled a shift in thinking — one that took WID well beyond **women-only** projects and tried to integrate a concern for women into mainstream projects and programmes. It was deemed insufficient to rely on special projects for women (e.g. income-generating projects), and important to ensure that women benefited from mainstream development programmes and projects as well. These points are taken up in part II of the paper.

It is also worth reiterating some of the anomalies thrown up in the WID literature. WID has often relied on examples drawn from sub-Saharan Africa to provide empirical evidence in support of its claims that resources directed to women will enhance economic productivity. In general, women in this region have been responsible for the family's food requirements, which has drawn them into agricultural labour — very often working in a combination of capacities. At times they work on independent plots of land to carry out their obligations; at others, they are expected to work on compound land, to provide for the collective granary, or as casual wage labourers — a phenomenon of increasing importance. Because women's familial responsibilities include food provisioning, they are likely to have some control over how they use their own labour, albeit within a system of household rights and obligations.

By contrast, in much of the so-called belt of "classic patriarchy" (stretching from north Africa across the Middle East and the northern plains of the Indian subcontinent to Bangladesh) it is men who have the main responsibility for household food provisioning. This does not mean that women are absent from agricultural production, as the term "male" farming seems to imply. In practice what it means is that women's labour contributions to household production are often subsumed under male controlled processes — which makes it all the more difficult to target resources to women. This general pattern, however, may be changing in many parts of the region in response to shifting socio-economic and political circumstances.

It is also important to be aware of the extent to which policy discourse on the role of women in agricultural production in sub-Saharan Africa has been based on exaggerated claims about women's roles — what Whitehead calls “myths and counter-myths” (1990). From an obstinate silence about it, when the term farmer was used to mean a man, there has more recently emerged a counter-myth — that of women's pre-eminence in sub-Saharan African food production, to the extent that it is not uncommon to find claims that women produce up to 80 per cent of the region's food. This has often served to mask the importance of male labour input into farming. “Female” farming systems, however, like their “male” counterparts, are based on a complex and changing interrelation of women's and men's work. If this is the case, how easily/efficiently can resources be targeted to reach women? What impact will access to new resources have on women's productivity and women's status in the household and in the community? These are the kinds of issues women and development researchers have been addressing.

A further anomaly has been WID's neglect of welfare concerns. As we have suggested above, a major preoccupation of WID advocates has been to establish women's issues as a serious “developmental concern”. To do so it was deemed necessary for the “welfare approach” to give way to the “developmental approach” (Buvinic, 1986). However, as Guyer and Peters (1987) note, although the reasons for making this distinction are understandable, it is a sad reflection on the state of our methods in development practice that a very real desire to recognize and serve individual women's needs should oppose “women” to the “family” (and development to welfare, or production to reproduction). Moreover, while at the level of data collection, analysis and sectoral planning, an artificial dichotomy can be posed between production and reproduction, in the reality of women's lives these aspects are necessarily integrated. While the increased agricultural work burden of women can serve “development” (national food security, for example), it may have unforeseen consequences for women's own health (Vaughan, 1986).

Divorcing welfare concerns from policy discourse on women may in fact generate as many problems as women's severance from production did in an earlier generation of development projects and programmes. For historical reasons (the legacy of the “welfare” era), WID advocates distanced themselves from welfare issues. This placed them at odds with the general thrust of development discourse in the 1970s, which emphasized basic needs. As will be seen below, there were other feminist critiques of development processes emerging at the time that challenged the WID focus on women's productive roles and argued instead for a greater recognition of the interlinkages between production and reproduction.

PART II

Rethinking Women in Development

What is a domesticated woman? A female of the Species ... She only becomes a domestic, a wife, a chattel, a playboy bunny, a prostitute or a human dictaphone in certain relations. Torn from these relationships she is no more the help-mate of man than gold in itself is money.

Gayle Rubin, 1975:158

Conflicts of interest between men and women are unlike other conflicts, such as class conflicts. A worker and a capitalist do not typically live together under the same roof — sharing concerns and experiences and acting jointly. This aspect of ‘togetherness’ gives the gender conflict some very special characteristics.

Amartya Sen, 1990:147

From WID to GAD

By the late 1970s, some of those working in the field of development were questioning the adequacy of focusing on women in isolation, which seemed to be a dominant feature of the WID approach. 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. As was noted above, WID identified women’s lack of access to resources as the key to their subordination without raising questions about the role of gender relations in restricting women’s access in the first place (and in subverting policy interventions, were they to direct resources to women). The work that was under way within various social science disciplines suggested the importance of power, conflict and gender relations in understanding women’s subordination.

Many influential writings appeared in the 1970s on the distinction between biological sex and social gender (Edholm et al., 1977; Rubin, 1975). Feminist anthropology gave increasing attention to the cultural representation of the sexes — the social construction of gender identity — and its determining influence on the relative position of men and women in society.¹² “Maleness” and “femaleness” were understood as the outcome of cultural ideologies, rather than of inherent qualities or physiology. The value of a symbolic analysis of gender, it was argued, lies in understanding how men and women are socially constructed, and how those constructions are powerfully reinforced by the social activities that both define and are defined by them (Moore, 1988:15-16). Status and power differentials between men and women, therefore, could not be easily read off from their respective positions within the relations of production.

Starting from a similar premise — namely that gender was social/cultural in origin rather than physiological — another general tendency was to approach the problem of gender relations through an analysis of what men and women **do**. Adopting a sociological approach, the main concern

was with gender as a social relationship; the realm of symbolic analysis — the social construction of gender identity — was not central to the theory. As the following account will show, the approaches to gender that have been adopted by the women and development advocates and scholars reviewed in this paper have tended to be informed by this sociological tradition.¹³ They have, for the most part, attempted to demonstrate the concrete materiality of gender subordination as it is constructed by the rules and practices of different institutions — household, market, state and community.

Of considerable influence at this juncture was the coming together of a number of feminist thinkers in 1977 to form the Subordination of Women Workshop. From that effort came the collected volume, **Of Marriage and the Market** (1981), which marked a significant watershed in the evolution of thinking on feminism and development. The contributors to the volume were critical of the growing body of WID literature on several grounds — it tended to isolate women as a separate and often homogeneous category, it was “predominantly descriptive”, as well as being “equivocal in its identification and analysis of women’s subordination” (Pearson, et al., 1981:x). They also aimed to fill another lacuna, one that had emerged from applying the economic categories of traditional Marxism to the analysis of gender relations. As the introduction to the volume put it: “We wanted to develop a theory of gender which was integrated into and informed by the general analysis of the world economy”, but one that problematized the link between gender and economy in a less deterministic way (Pearson, 1981:x).

It is difficult to generalize about the range of approaches to women and development that have evolved during recent years. “Gender” has become the panacea of those working in the field, yet few analyses exist of the way in which “gender” is being applied as a policy-making and planning tool. In fact, as we hope to demonstrate, “gender” is being used in a number of different ways. One way to assess these approaches is to look at the “gender training” methodologies promoted by researchers and development agencies. We concentrate here on two such frameworks — “gender roles” and “social relations analysis”. By comparing these two frameworks, it is possible to draw out some of the main tensions in the way gender is being used by researchers and practitioners.

What the two approaches share is a gender-disaggregated analysis of roles and access/control over resources. Where they diverge is in the degree to which gender analysis is extended beyond the sphere of production to include the range of relations through which needs are met — the rights and obligations, norms and values that sustain social life. The two frameworks are also different in the degree to which they attach analytical weight to other social relations (i.e., those of class, caste, etc.). And finally, they diverge in the extent to which efficiency or equity arguments are used as the basis for revising development planning — what Kabeer refers to as “the political sub-text of training frameworks” (1992:22).

Here we also examine some recent writings by economists on gender and structural adjustment. This new theoretical approach illustrates an innovative and systematic way of thinking about gender using economic tools of analysis. The insights gained from the way gender works at the micro-economic level are in turn linked to macro-economic policy concerns. It is argued here that, despite their far greater theoretical rigour, the underlying assumptions about gender relations in these analyses overlap to some extent with those underpinning the gender roles framework.

The second training framework under review — social relations analysis — provides a less economic conceptualization of gender. The emphasis on women's empowerment in the women and development literature can be seen as the action-oriented outgrowth of social relations analysis. In other words, if one were to draw out the policy implications of social relations analysis, one would have to include women's empowerment among them.

The gender roles framework

The gender roles framework was developed by researchers at the Harvard Institute of International Development in collaboration with the Women in Development Office of USAID and has become a popular approach within other mainstream development institutions.¹⁴ This framework derives from insights and concerns of the early WID approach, in particular the already-mentioned project appraisals.¹⁵ The theoretical underpinning for the framework is provided by “sex role theory” that informs liberal feminism (Connell, 1987). Many of the shortcomings that critics have identified in the gender roles framework are thus a reiteration of those directed at sex role theory.

The framework takes as its starting point that the household is not an undifferentiated grouping of people with a common production and consumption function. Households are seen as systems of resource allocation themselves (Sims Feldstein and Poats, 1989:10). Gender equity is defined in terms of individual access to and control over resources; women's (actual and potential) productive contributions provide the rationale for allocating resources to them. Gender equity and economic efficiency are thus synergistic.

What does gender analysis entail? “Gender analysis” is described as a diagnostic tool for planners to overcome inefficient resource allocation (see Overholt et al., 1985; Sims Feldstein and Poats, 1989). It identifies gender-based divisions in productive and reproductive work, and gender differences in access to and control over income and resources. It then considers the implications of these divisions and differences for project design. In other words, it aims to highlight the key differences between the incentives and constraints under which men and women work; the insights gained from this analysis are then used for tailoring planned interventions (credit, education, training, etc.) in such a way as to improve overall productivity.

One popular example of this type of approach is Cloud's analytical framework for agricultural projects (Cloud, 1985). The first step involves developing an activity profile for the individuals performing different productive activities by asking an open-ended series of questions about the division of labour within the household. The second step of the framework overlaps with the first but places more focus on access to and control over resources (land, technology, labour, capital, etc.) and benefits (income, assets, etc.). In each phase, planners are encouraged to ask questions about the impact of project components on women's time availability as well as on their access to and control over productive resources and benefits. If, for example, a project places new labour demands on adult women, planners are encouraged to ask questions about how that will impact on their existing productive and reproductive activities, their leisure time, and on the responsibilities of other household members. Might daughters, for example, be withdrawn from school in order to take over their mothers' reproductive responsibilities as a result of adult women's increased agricultural work burden?

The gender roles framework thus provides important data on the distribution of roles and resources within the household. The systematic enquiry into men's and women's activities attempts to overcome the ideologies and stereotypes that render invisible women's work. Armed with such information, planners and policy makers are in a position to avoid some of the previous mistakes that resulted in project failures (as in the Gambian case cited above).

The gender roles framework puts forward gender analysis as a non-confrontational approach to planning.

Shifting discussion of farm women's roles from social to economic terms has the advantage of permitting rational discussion using commonly accepted analytic tools and arguments. It **pays** to deliver resources to women in agricultural systems (Cloud, 1985:18; emphasis in original).

Like the WID approach, the emphasis of the gender roles framework is placed squarely on economic arguments for delivering resources to women. Viewed from this perspective, the shift from WID to GAD can be interpreted as a way of disposing of both "women" and "equity", two issues presumably most likely to meet a wall of resistance from policy makers primarily interested in "talking economics". The framework thereby translates some important components of the gender division of labour into a language that is unthreatening and accessible.

While the attempt to differentiate activities and resources along gender lines goes a long way in meeting the demand for a gender-sensitive planning methodology, the framework falls short in a number of respects. These failures, we would argue, stem from the way the gender division of labour is conceptualized.

By treating the gender division of labour primarily as a relationship of separation, the gender roles framework encourages the neglect of its "social connectedness" (Kabeer, 1992:14). Although the gender division

of labour involves men and women undertaking different activities, it also entails an intricate and changing system of co-operation and exchange — one that is potentially conflictual. In fact, the allocation of responsibilities for household maintenance is as important a family process as the allocation of resources. Even in the sub-Saharan African context where women and men engage in a limited degree of independent farming, women's outputs have often been seen as a source of accumulation as well as a buffer for fluctuations in men's incomes (Guyer, 1988). Moreover, while the management of responsibilities has tended to be gender-specific (e.g. men pay for children's school fees while women buy foodstuffs), specialization has never been complete. The division of responsibilities tends to oscillate according to each sex's ability to cope with its own sphere, and its ability either to tap into the other or to shift the responsibilities. For example, where the revenues from men's cash crops have dropped, women have had to intensify their productive activities (e.g. beer brewing, commerce) to assume many of men's traditional responsibilities. Conversely, women's enhanced earning capacity very often means that they will end up making a more significant contribution to household budgeting as men's contributions are re-directed to other uses (personal consumption, productive investment, etc.). By neglecting the concrete relations between men and women, the framework fails to raise questions about how change is brought about in men's and women's roles in production and in the division of responsibilities between them. Similar criticisms have been made of sex role theory: the emphasis on role learning and socialization results in an "abstract view of the differences between the sexes, and between their situations", not a concrete account of the relations between them that can grasp social conflict and change (Connell, 1987:50-54).

A further limitation of the framework's neglect of "togetherness" is that it does not pay sufficient attention to the way in which powerful gender relations can subvert resources directed at women. By refusing to ask questions about why resources are so unevenly distributed between the genders in the first place, the issue of power asymmetry is effectively brushed aside. And following from that, the assumption seems to be made that easing women's access to resources translates unproblematically into their control over how these resources are used. The problems with this assumption can be demonstrated by citing some preliminary results emerging from research on credit programmes for women.

There has been a dramatic increase over the past decade in the provision of credit to low-income landless women in rural Bangladesh, who by all accounts seem to be good credit risks. Notwithstanding the particular difficulties of monitoring loan control once credit enters the rural household, research findings suggest that the official figures mask a significant degree of male appropriation of women's loans.¹⁶ Such evidence indicates the degree to which women's ability to retain control over resources allocated to them is mediated by the powerful social relations and gender ideologies that render them subordinate and not fully autonomous in the first place.

It is important, however, not to portray women as outright victims: in relinquishing control over credit, women may stand to gain indirectly. The negative consequences of male appropriation — women beneficiaries losing direct benefits and autonomy — have to be weighed against an improvement in status that women may enjoy by virtue of their newly acquired loans. Rahman, for example, found that Grameen Bank women borrowers who had transferred their entire loan to a male relative had a higher nutritional status, and had more money spent on their clothing and medical needs, than the wives of male borrowers (cited in Goetz and Sen Gupta, 1994). Even if women borrowers do not experience an improvement in their status, they may still see an enhancement in their personal well-being by virtue of the overall improvement in household income. They may also value the welfare gains of other household members — especially their children.

The above observations nudge at a more fundamental problem, namely the difficulty of conceptualizing women's interests. The conventional economic model that assumes a unity of interest between all household members is clearly inadequate. But neither can the assumption of total separation of interests between them provide a satisfactory alternative. As Whitehead notes:

A woman's own welfare may be sufficiently linked to the success of the market production part of the household farming enterprise that she may be prepared to intensify work effort on crops for which the returns for effort are not commensurate with the amount she puts in. Or she may have interests in the welfare of other household members which lead her to acquiesce in pressure to make her work harder (1990:457).

A similar logic can apply to women's willingness to hand over their loans to their husbands: they may relinquish control over their loans because of the presumed welfare gains for themselves and/or for their children. It is misleading, therefore, to see women's interests as entirely separate from those of other household members.

It should be clear from the above observations that women's circumscribed autonomy can be interpreted in different ways. On the one hand, it may be seen as the outcome of unequal power relations and gender ideologies that construct women as subordinate and not fully autonomous agents (implicit in Goetz and Sen Gupta's assessment of credit policies). Alternatively, it can be seen as a manifestation of the interconnectedness of the interests of women and other household members, a willingness, on the part of women, to engage in relationships that entail loss of autonomy because of the way they interpret the responsibilities of motherhood (implicit in Whitehead's critique of neo-classical decision-making models). In either case, however, the gender roles framework's assumptions of autonomy seem misplaced: the complexity of conjugal relations lies precisely in its mix of social and economic, selfishness and altruism, and conflict and co-operation. These issues are dealt with more fully in our discussion of social relations analysis.

Gender and efficiency at the policy-making level

In her most recent work, Moser (1993:69-73) sees the “efficiency approach” as the predominant policy approach to women, its purpose being to ensure that development is made more efficient and effective through women’s economic contribution. What Moser is referring to here are the adjustment measures being implemented by numerous governments, under the aegis of multilateral financial institutions. Like Elson (1991), she argues that many of these policies have an inherent male bias. The arguments are by now fairly well-known: that in cutting social sector expenditure and thereby shifting the costs of welfare from the state to “the household”, SAPs have relied on women’s ability to take on an increasing burden of unpaid work (e.g. caring for the sick, looking after the young, etc.). In other words, women’s unpaid labour has tended to absorb the shocks of adjustment, or as the new analogy has it, it sustains people as they “cross the desert”.¹⁷

What Moser does not mention, but what is significant in the context of our present discussion, is a related set of analyses by economists of adjustment and gender — what we have termed the “gender efficiency approach” (Appleton et al., 1991; Collier, 1989; Palmer, 1991; 1992). The novelty of this genre of writing lies in the way it conceptualizes gender using neo-classical tools of analysis (factor market rigidities, informational biases, market distortions), juxtaposed against an appreciation of intrahousehold inequalities and bargaining. More significantly, the analysis of gender relations is systematically linked to the design of structural adjustment programmes. “Gender analysis” is thereby taken well beyond the project focus of the gender roles framework and into the realm of macro-economic policy-making.

It should come as no surprise that these authors, like many others writing in the 1980s and 1990s, have located their analyses in the context of economies undergoing structural adjustment. But instead of the usual focus on how SAPs have affected the welfare of women and children (e.g. UNICEF’s **Adjustment with a Human Face**), their concern is to show how gender biases and rigidities affect adjustment policies, and can ultimately frustrate them. The focus is therefore squarely placed on gender relations, i.e., on the structure of relations between men and women. Such a clear and sustained focus is missing in many other attempts of this kind. The Commonwealth Secretariat (1989), for example, assessed the gender impacts of adjustment by distinguishing between the four dimensions of women’s lives: women as producers, home managers, mothers and community organizers. By looking at women’s roles in isolation, though, it failed to bring in men, and the question of male power over women (Elson, 1993a:5). This is where the Palmer/Collier models provide a more promising approach. It should be noted, however, that both models are concerned with gender and adjustment in the African context.

Gender and adjustment: The models

What is the nature of the argument that is being put forward? Adjustment, neo-classical economists would agree, is essentially about inducing the inter-sectoral flow of resources (especially labour and credit) from non-tradables to tradables in order to alter what are seen as original misallocations of resources between sectors.¹⁸ If resources, however, are not mobile between sectors, raising prices of tradables is not likely to bring about the desired flow. The thrust of Palmer's and Collier's arguments is to show how resources (especially female labour and credit) may be allocated between sectors in a skewed and inefficient manner due to various constraints (see below). Moreover, the same constraints may reduce the mobility of resources between sectors, and leave them "stuck" in the production of non-tradables.

Collier locates four distinct processes that account for why women face differential constraints upon economic activity — processes based on underlying "social conventions". The first is discrimination outside the household — in labour markets and in credit markets. The second is that role models (in production) are gender-specific, i.e., girls copy women, while boys copy men. If some new economic opportunity is initially taken up by men, therefore, it may automatically be diffused over the male population by a mechanism that will not transmit it to the female population. The third is that within the household there are asymmetric rights and obligations between husband and wife, such that women have little incentive to increase their labour input. The final element is the burden of reproduction, with its attendant demands on women's health and time (Collier, 1989:8).

Similar processes are identified by Palmer, even though intrahousehold markets and bargaining assume a more prominent place in her analysis, while "role copying" is largely absent. Within households, she argues, at least in the African context, there are markets — albeit rigged ones. The social aspects of gender impose their own definitions of correct exchange, which tend to reflect bargaining power and status, and inevitably this means that the terms of trade are biased against women. This can be described as an asymmetry of obligations and responsibilities between women and men (Palmer, 1991:11-15).

Unlike the above-mentioned adjustment measures criticized by Moser and others, in this new approach women's unpaid work is therefore seen in economic terms. Palmer in fact takes the argument much further and regards the burden of reproduction as a tax on female labour, which women have to pay before they can join in market activities. The "reproductive tax" not only limits the time women can spend in economic activities, it also restricts them to activities that are compatible with their home schedule. This, in economic terms, amounts to gender discrimination and therefore a misallocation of women's total labour resources; and because distortions in factor markets create distortions in product markets, the reproductive tax on women "sends ripples of inefficiencies throughout the economy" (Palmer, 1991:163).¹⁹

What are the implications for public policy? According to Collier (1989:10), if private sector labour and credit markets and private processes of information dissemination all make it likely that women will be less mobile than men, there is a good case that where public mechanisms exist they should have an offsetting bias. If these rigidities could be overcome through public interventions (e.g. by redressing the male bias in financial markets, in education and in extension services, and re-targeting payments made by public marketing channels), then women would be able to participate more fully in the production of tradables — the booming sector under SAPs. This would reduce gender inequity, as well as reducing economic stagnation — hence the convergence between gender equity and economic efficiency. He notes, however, that so far public interventions have tended to exacerbate private biases.

Palmer, like Collier, recommends legislative and institutional reform of the public sector in the short to medium term.²⁰ But she takes the efficiency argument a step further and questions the presumed efficiency of the smallholder that underpins adjustment policy support for the “small farm” (via land titling and agricultural services). If male smallholders were to hire female labour, she asserts, their presumed superiority in efficiency terms would become questionable. According to Palmer (1991:155-157), encouraging alternative rural employment for women (in plantations, for example) can be a desirable means of freeing their labour from family production where it is used lavishly, and forcing a proper costing of labour on the family farm manager who would now have to hire labour.

Her recommendations for achieving long-term dynamic efficiency include opening up the non-biological elements of women’s reproductive labour to market forces (“a calculus of costs”): “tap water and electrification of homes means a paid workforce in public utilities. Creches mean professional, paid child-minders” (Palmer, 1991:165).²¹ This, according to Palmer, would not only reduce the amount of unpaid work women would have to do, but would also increase efficiency in the reproduction of human capital.

She warns that current adjustment policies may be worsening gender-based misallocations by shifting more of the “caring” onto women. Moreover, the rising prices of tradables will increase the asymmetry of access to resources in the farm household by giving greater incentives to the crop portfolios of men who have the power to swing increments of land, working capital and family labour in their favour (Palmer, 1991:77-78). Nevertheless, despite such observations of “misguided” policies, hopes continue to be pinned on the ability of public policy to somehow “set things right” in the future.

Gender and adjustment: Some general remarks

A number of observations can be made at this point. First, it is important, at least in the context of our present discussion, to be aware of the political subtext of writings on gender and adjustment. The literature being considered in this section does not constitute a monolithic discourse. There are, for example, a number of neo-classical economists for whom gender is an illustration, or a means for understanding the complexities of a far more important process, namely adjustment.

... just as our understanding of the macroeconomics of adjustment has gained from the disaggregation of goods markets by their tradability, so our understanding of the microeconomics of adjustment can benefit from a disaggregation by gender (Collier, 1989:1).

For Palmer, however, framing gender within neo-classical discourse, above and beyond any merit it may have in enhancing the overall understanding of adjustment, has a polemical function — namely that of winning over policy makers. The point of making this distinction is to place her work within its historical context. “Gender and adjustment” then becomes the continuation of a political strategy — albeit analytically a far more sophisticated version of earlier attempts — of putting women on the agenda of policy makers by showing how they can serve development. Moreover, as a political strategy, “gender and adjustment” seems to be a timely response — one that uses the dominant neo-liberal discourse to urge policy makers to take account of the economic costs of ignoring the “gender bias”.

Adjustment strategies mean that demands for resources must now be supported by persuasion that there will be an economic dividend ... if it can be argued that *gender issues impact on adjustment* at every turn then it might be easier to persuade policy makers to review gender issues at the earliest stage of planning, before options on overall adjustment strategies are closed off and certainly before policy packages are detailed (Palmer, 1992:70; emphasis in original).

Second, the analyses presented here share a number of key assumptions with the gender roles framework: both recognize intrahousehold gender differences in work and in access to and control over resources and income. These differences are used by both frameworks as the basis for analysing the incentives and constraints under which men and women work. Women, for example, may not contribute labour to their husbands’ agricultural enterprises because they do not have access to the revenues. There is also a clear recognition in both frameworks that women’s burden of reproductive work acts as a constraint on their ability to engage in productive activities. And finally, as in the gender roles framework, the insights gained from the micro-economics of gender are used for tailoring planned interventions in such a way as to improve overall economic efficiency.

The policy implications are, however, pitched at different levels: the gender roles framework tailors its interventions at the level of projects, while “gender and adjustment” links gender analysis to macro-economic concerns. And the writings being considered in this section attempt to theorize gender using economic tools of analysis, while the gender roles framework is informed by sociological theory (sex roles). Collier, for example, uses elements of new institutional economics (imperfect information) to explain the “stickiness” in gender roles; the gender specificity of role models acts as a barrier and prevents the smooth reallocation of labour in response to price signals. Palmer (and to some extent, Collier) draws on bargaining models — another approach within institutional economics — to explain the processes of intrahousehold decision-making for labour and resource allocation. The recognition of bargaining and conflict within the household, in particular, goes a long way in meeting the feminist demand for power relations to be given an explicit recognition in analyses of gender — a major shortcoming of sex role theory. These attempts at theorizing gender are discussed more fully in the following section; in the remaining part of this section we consider some of the general problems thrown up by the models.

One of the main difficulties in reading Palmer’s work is that her conceptualization of markets slides around between different meanings of the term, and at certain critical points falls into what has been termed “abstract markets” (Hewitt de Alcántara, 1993; IDS, 1993; Mackintosh, 1990).²² While her critique of gender discrimination within private credit markets, for example, appears to be a description of how “real” credit markets operate, some of her policy recommendations are clearly framed within the realm of “abstract” markets (i.e., idealized models). Her argument in favour of large-scale commercial agriculture is a case in point.

The solution to the under-valuation of women’s labour within smallholder agriculture, we are told, is to be found by encouraging female employment in the large-scale commercial sector. This, however, ignores the fact that definitions of labour (female, migrant, skilled, etc.) are built into the way markets operate. In other words, even though a female labourer does not work on a commercial estate in her capacity as “wife”, her labour is nevertheless defined as “female”, thereby carrying her subordinate status with her into the workplace. The literature on female employment within both the commercial agricultural sector and the industrial sector (including TNCs) provides an abundance of insights into how social norms about “femininity”, “women’s work” and “wifely dependence” operate within these so-called impersonal markets to create separate male and female spheres (Elson and Pearson, 1981; Joekes, 1985; Kabeer, 1989). One of the interesting points emerging from these studies is that the difference in pay and work conditions is not always due to women’s lower skills and/or educational levels. As Susan Joekes (1985) points out in her study of the Moroccan clothing industry, male and female machinists were performing identical tasks, but women earned 70 per cent of what men earned — even though women were regarded by management as producing better quality work and were acknowledged as having higher educational levels.

There are other problems as well with the suggestion that public support to smallholders be ceased. It is not very clear, for example, whether the relative efficiency of smallholders vis-à-vis large-scale commercial enterprises is entirely due to their access to unpaid female labour. More to the point, even if they were relatively inefficient, this may not necessarily outweigh the equity considerations (in class terms) underpinning public support for them. This raises questions about how practical a plantation policy would be for a large number of countries in Africa under present conditions: can African women activists and policy makers seriously use it in their struggles for gender equality? Moreover, women from smallholder households may not necessarily wish to exchange the direct and indirect benefits accruing to them through the “conjugal contract” for a money wage. It is also not very clear how the division of responsibilities between husband and wife would adjust to the new circumstances where women earn a money wage: would men, for example, renege on their financial responsibilities vis-à-vis children and other dependants, expecting their wives to fill in the gaps? Such questions are necessarily raised if we take gender seriously — not just as a way of structuring aspects of production, but also as a set of powerful social norms about how rights and responsibilities are to be shared.

By taking the gender efficiency argument to its logical conclusion (or extreme), Palmer, in fact, exposes its main weaknesses. In prioritizing gender over and above all other social cleavages — especially class — arguments made in favour of gender become abstract, and far removed from the competing concerns that policy makers have to attend to. Moreover, her treatment of conjugal relations ignores the co-operative aspects of marriage: in many instances women (wrongly or rightly) identify their interests with those of their households. It seems inappropriate therefore to frame policy questions on the basis of a presumed complete separation of interests between husband and wife. Some of these inadequacies stem from her conceptualization of intrahousehold relations, which is discussed in more detail below.

There are also a number of more general problems with the analyses of Collier and Palmer. The export sector is not always a booming sector, even though with liberalization and devaluation it seems to be doing much better than the food crop sector generally. The cocoa boom in Nigeria and Ghana burst a long time ago with the collapse of international prices, the problems of ageing trees, rise in input costs and environmental problems. Furthermore, an expansion in traditional exports has its own limitations from a long-term price perspective. Many researchers and agencies like UNICEF and UNCTAD believe that the fall in commodity prices in the 1980s is partly linked to the expansion in agricultural output that accompanied the introduction of the new structure of incentives. With this in view, will women’s participation in the production of tradables reduce economic stagnation? It will obviously contribute to gender equity but not necessarily to economic growth.²³

Finally, a point that we have not raised so far — but that deserves attention — is the rather benign and simplistic view of “public policy”

that is implicit in these models. Both feminist political scientists (Goetz, 1992; Staudt, 1978; 1990) and political economists (Harriss-White, 1993; Mackintosh, 1994) have been arguing for a more realistic assessment of the behaviour of public agencies. Far from being gender-neutral organizations (“rational” in the Weberian sense), public agencies and bureaucracies tend to institutionalize the power asymmetries attached to gender difference; they also tend to be poor instruments for implementing gender policies (Goetz, 1992). In fact, the dissatisfaction with public policies, hierarchical bureaucracies, and “top-down planning” has encouraged many gender policy advocates to rely on grassroots organizations and NGOs to bring pressure on planners and policy makers and to increase public accountability to women. Some of these issues are addressed at the end of the paper.

Gender and adjustment: Conceptualizing gender

There are also a number of problems with the way gender is conceptualized in these models.²⁴ According to Lockwood (1992), Collier in fact fails to explain the constraints on mobility and labour allocation that are central to his model. By attributing these constraints to “social convention”, the explanation for gender identity is effectively placed outside the model — either seen as part of the natural world or somehow beyond explanation. This mystification, however, goes against the thrust of recent feminist scholarship, which documents the historical construction and accentuation of gender identity in Africa. The contemporary gender divisions in African agriculture, far from being “natural” or the result of a mysterious “social convention”, are in fact the outcome of a “definitely economic history” (Lockwood, 1992). Processes of economic change or commoditization, initiated at the onset of colonial rule and intensified during periods of higher commodity prices in the 1920s and 1950s, played a significant part in accentuating gender differences in control over land and labour, in intensifying the demands placed on domestic production, and also in changing the meaning of domestic production, making it not only gender-specific, but also less valued.

The critique, however, is not merely of historical relevance. Similar processes appear to be under way on the continent as a result of current adjustment policies. The rising prices of tradables seem to be worsening the relative gender imbalance in control exercised over agricultural technology, information and family labour. Palmer, in fact, warns that “[a]djustment, by giving price incentives to tradables, essentially exercises the same forces as the colonial promotion of cash crops” (1991:178). At the same time, the cuts in social expenditure (to increase efficiency) and the transfer of costs onto women are intensifying the burden of domestic work. In the same way that the feminization of domestic production underwrote cheap labour in the tradable sector during the colonial and post-colonial period, the shifting of costs onto women appears to be absorbing some of the shocks of current adjustment policies. In sum, economic processes associated with structural adjustment (commoditization, cuts in social expenditure) seem to be

accentuating the very gender biases and rigidities that Collier and Palmer identify as “problems” for adjustment.

Collier’s model seems to offer little insight into the way gender relations in Africa have changed and continue to change in the context of economic restructuring. The characterization of gender roles as “natural” misses the important point that gender roles in Africa are the outcome of economic forces very similar to those unleashed by current structural adjustment policies. Although Palmer admits that women in Africa are currently absorbing the “shocks of adjustment” (as they did during the colonial and post-colonial period), this observation is not built systematically into her model — in other words, market integration and commercialization do not figure among the processes identified by her to account for gender inequality.

Moreover, she argues that what might be seen as higher efficiency (e.g. cuts in social expenditure) is in fact a shift of costs from the paid to the unpaid economy. Hence, the benefits of gender roles for adjustment are apparent rather than real. She would therefore go along with Collier, arguing that gender roles are “sub-optimal” and that it is imperative that public policy intervene to counter the influence of “social convention”.

If the processes unleashed by economic restructuring are not considered to be responsible for the creation and accentuation of gender inequality, how then is the reproduction of gender inequality explained? As in other models of imperfect information, the main sources of change in Collier’s model are external: changes in relative prices, and in the relative costs and benefits of information and transactions (Lockwood, 1992). Reducing the reproduction of gender inequality to information costs, however, may appear to many to be unduly reductionist. Does Palmer’s analytical framework, which relies more heavily on notions of intrahousehold bargaining and exchange (and less on information and transaction costs), offer a more satisfactory alternative?

Palmer considers intrahousehold allocations of resources to be essentially the same as market exchanges, for they involve two people with “different interests” bargaining and exchanging resources — “the basic attributes of markets” (1991:14). Conjugal conflict over the labour process, then, can be equated with employer-employee bargaining. The availability of employment opportunities for women in large-scale agricultural enterprises, for example, will enforce a “proper costing” of women’s labour, freeing them from their family obligations where their labour is used lavishly.

Such analogies, however, seem misleading for the way they ignore the workings of gender ideologies, and the special features of “togetherness” that characterize conjugal relations. The framing of intrahousehold relations in terms of bargaining and exchange helps capture the coexistence of extensive conflicts and pervasive co-operation in household arrangements. But it neglects the influence of a number of other factors. In his discussion of bargaining models, Sen (1990) grapples

with these issues by highlighting the influence of **perceived** interests and **perceived** contributions on husband-wife bargaining.

A recurrent theme in the literature on intrahousehold relations is women's tendency to identify with the interests of other household members — especially their children. Such altruistic behaviour (“maternal altruism”), as we have already noted, has been interpreted in various ways. Some see it as a manifestation of “false consciousness” or “illusion”, assuming that there exist objective guides to real interests (such as human development indices or Amartya Sen's functionings and capabilities). According to this interpretation, the underdog comes to rationalize his or her own position as something voluntary, thereby accepting the legitimacy of the unequal order. Others, however, have questioned liberal notions of individual autonomy, seeing “maternal altruism” as part of the moral world in which individuals operate.

In either case, the assumption of clear and unambiguous perceptions of individual interest seems to miss the ideological/moral factors that condition behaviour in significant ways. Even if one assumes that interests can be objectively defined, perceptions of interest are important “not because they are definitive guides to individual interests and well-being ... but because the perceptions (including illusions) have an influence — often a major impact — on actual states and outcomes” (Sen, 1990:128). These points are discussed at greater length in the following section on social relations analysis.

Gender and efficiency: Concluding remarks

The models discussed above constitute an innovative departure in the literature on women and development. They provide a systematic way of thinking about gender using economic tools of analysis, as well as a way of assessing the impact of gender differences on macro-economic concerns. Gender is thus made relevant to policy-making with arguments for economic efficiency (rather than equity). Gender policy advocates may find that efficiency arguments can be a particularly potent political strategy for the way they turn the dominant neo-liberal discourse into an advocacy tool and promote communication with economists and economic policy makers.

What the above critique has suggested is that in using economic models (imperfect information, bargaining, market exchange) some important aspects of gender relations have been lost. A number of points were raised in this section, some of the more important being the models' neglect of historical and contemporary evidence on the impact of market integration and commercialization on gender inequality, the neglect of ideological/moral factors that have a major impact on gender relations, and the neglect of other social cleavages (especially class). There are also political implications following from these observations. Gender advocates may find the framing of “gender and adjustment” a case of “misguided policies” (i.e., policy makers working with the wrong conceptual guides), and the excessive reliance on top-down planning to “set things right” to be negligent of the fact that policy-making

institutions are themselves “gendered” and that they often respond to pressures of a political nature.

Given, however, the enormous rhetorical appeal of the concept of efficiency, and the importance of maintaining communication with those in the policy formulation process, instead of abandoning the discourse of efficiency altogether because of its excessively narrow neo-classical focus, one can turn to the work of feminist economists who have broadened the scope of economics and of economic efficiency to include sustainable human development among its objectives. A feminist critique of economic policy reform at the macro level questions how economic policy treats the interdependence between the “productive economy” and the “reproductive economy”, between making a profit and meeting needs, between covering costs and sustaining human beings (Elson, 1993b:14). Macro-economics is criticized for its male bias, for its one-sided view of the macro-economy: for only considering the monetary aggregates of “productive economy” and ignoring the human resource aggregates of the “reproductive economy” (Elson, 1993b:16). A suggested way forward is to campaign in order that all programmes for macro-economic policy reform include not only targets for monetary aggregates but also targets for human development aggregates (Elson, 1993b:16).

As noted above, feminist economists like Diane Elson are also less optimistic than neo-classical economists about the ability of markets to provide both an efficient use of resources and gender equity. Markets, Elson argues, are not abstract cash nexuses; they are “inevitably social institutions in which buying and selling is structured asymmetrically to the advantage of some participants rather than others”, social norms are intrinsically built into them, and they mean insecurity and risk as well as opportunity (Elson, 1993a:22). Hence, there is a need to restructure market relationships through political action: contesting current social norms about gender; fostering the creation of new market institutions organized around new, more equal, gender norms; and enhancing women’s bargaining power through women’s networks and collective organizations.

Social relations analysis

This section examines social relations analysis, another training approach through which gender is operationalized.²⁵ Gender relations refer specifically to those dimensions of social relations that create differences in the positioning of men and women in social processes. It is through gender relations that men are given a greater capacity than women to mobilize a variety of cultural roles and material resources in pursuit of their own interests. The central problematic within this approach is not women’s integration into development *per se* but the social structures, processes, and relations that give rise to women’s disadvantaged position in a given society. As such, ending women’s subordination is viewed as more than a matter of reallocating economic resources. It involves redistributing power. The assumption being made here is that it may be difficult to reallocate economic resources equitably without changes in

social relations. Rather than downplaying the “political” dimension of gender, social relations analysis brings it to the core of its analysis.

As a method of operationalizing gender, social relations analysis demands a significant understanding of gender relations as there are no “quick fixes” for overcoming gender inequality.²⁶ Social relations analysis does not take as its starting point efficiency arguments about women’s contribution to development. Instead, development agencies are urged to take a more gender-aware approach to development on the grounds that it will help to “improve development policy and practice” (IDS, n.d.). This does not mean that those adopting social relations analysis are uninterested in having resources allocated to women or in raising women’s productivity levels; however, they do not make the assumption that raising women’s productivity is simply a matter of reallocating resources, nor will reallocating resources to women necessarily lead to women’s equality or autonomy. More importantly, proponents of social relations analysis recognize that the redistributive process is a zero sum game (Kabeer, 1994:97). Although it is hoped that all will win in the long run, in the short and even the medium term men will have to relinquish some of their economic, political and social power.

Social relations analysis begins from the premise that development planning needs to take account of both the relations of production and the interrelated range of relations through which needs are met, “the social relations of everyday life” (Pearson, Whitehead and Young, 1981: x). This ensemble of relations governs the processes of production and reproduction, distribution and consumption. Consequently, all planning, either at the macro or micro level, has to be informed by some understanding of the broad set of social relations through which production is organized and needs are met.

Given the holistic approach taken by social relations analysis, other forms of social differentiation also need to be taken into consideration, including class, ethnicity, age, caste, etc. “Gender, class, race and other divisions cross-cut one another. And this means that any group of women will have something in common — but will differ in other ways” (IDS, n.d.).

The important point for planners and policy makers here is the need to take into account both the similarities and **differences** among women. It also implies that for any given context it is necessary to assess the importance of a range of factors; in some cases, gender may not be the key factor of analysis (see Goetz, 1989). The framework also draws attention to social relations embedded in the range of institutions through which social groups acquire resources: the household, the community, the market and the state (Kabeer, 1994). Thus, social relations analysis takes us beyond the gender roles framework’s focus on the household.

One of the main differences between the gender roles framework and social relations analysis is the way in which the division of labour between men and women is conceptualized. As illustrated above, from

the perspective of the gender roles framework, the gender division of labour is essentially a form of social separation. In contrast, from a social relations analysis perspective the gender division of labour is understood as a form of “social connection”. In assigning women and men to different responsibilities, activities and spheres, the gender division of labour also makes it essential for them to engage in relationships of co-operation and exchange (K. Young, 1993:140; Kabeer, 1992:14; Whitehead, n.d.). As Kabeer has pointed out, however, this interdependence is not symmetrical. The unequal division of resources and responsibilities means that gender relations involve conflict as well as co-operation (1992:19).

This conceptualization of the division of labour has two important implications for planners and policy makers. First, it suggests that even if women can exercise control over particular products or stages of production, they will not necessarily gain real autonomy or equality unless the overall terms of exchange and co-operation are also shifted in their favour. In her work on household resource management, for example, Young suggests that there is no direct relationship between women’s ability to earn an independent income and their power in household decision-making. Other factors have been shown to affect this relationship, including length of marriage, age and number of children, ownership of other resources, and possession of social resources (e.g. prestige of occupation, natal family’s social position and social network) (K. Young, n.d.:18-19). Social relations analysis brings into focus the range of factors that determines a woman’s power. Its findings challenge the assumption that improving women’s economic status will always lead to a positive change in their overall decision-making power or say in the disposition of joint income.

Secondly, the conceptualization of the division of labour as “social connection” suggests that interventions in the form of new resources to **either** men or women will upset pre-existing systems of exchange, sometimes with negative consequences. Goetz’s (1989) review of a UNDP/UNIFEM fish-smoking project in Guinea provides one example of this.

Using an approach very close to that described above as the gender roles framework, the project identified the different activities undertaken by women and men in a fishing community. The aim was to introduce labour-saving technology into the stages of production in which women were concentrated, with a view to increasing their productivity. In this community it was primarily men who caught the fish, which were then smoked and marketed by women. The project organized women’s collectives and gave them new fish-smoking ovens.

The project did not succeed in improving returns to women’s labour despite its analysis of gender roles. According to Goetz, the project failure can be attributed to its treatment of women’s activities in isolation from the social relations of production in fishing (1989:6). There was an implicit assumption that project intervention at one stage of the production process would have no impact on other stages.

Over time, the women of the community had established bargaining relationships with the fishermen (in some cases their husbands) whereby men were assured regular outlets for processing and marketing their fish while women depended on men for the supply of fish. The project, by introducing new technology to women, disrupted this system of interdependencies without offering alternatives to the traditional methods of supply. Perceiving women as beneficiaries of outside funds, the men increased the price of their fish beyond what the project groups could afford. Alternative fish supplies had to be purchased at unprofitably high prices and added to labour inputs of the activity. As Goetz concludes, focusing on the gender division of tasks in the production process without considering their interdependencies undermined a functioning system without providing an alternative that might have enhanced women's control over their productive activities.

A critical concern of social relations analysis, therefore, is the precise terms under which men and women co-operate and the specific institutions (marriage, the household, the community, the market, the state, etc.) through which such co-operation is structured.²⁷ As the above example indicates, social relations embedded in institutions are central to the analysis of one of the key WID concerns — women's productivity. This can also be seen in the way in which social relations analysis evaluates women's economic incentives and disincentives.

One central argument made by those using social relations analysis is that a neo-classical decision-making framework is not sufficient for understanding the matrix of social relations through which production, distribution and consumption are carried out. Instead, social relations analysis gives primacy to the "moral economy" (Kabeer, 1992:11). Because conventional economic planning considers primarily individualized production and material resources, it undervalues more fluid social or relational resources such as rights, obligations and claims. As Scott (cited in Kabeer, 1992:12) points out, the "moral economy" often involves relationships that entail loss of status and autonomy in exchange for some measure of security. For women, the gender relations of family and kinship frequently embody a trade-off between security and autonomy.

Whitehead's research on women's family labour intensity in sub-Saharan Africa referred to above provides some insight into the economic trade-offs women are likely to make. According to Whitehead, "what determines wives' work intensity is a complex of factors associated with other kinds of investment in the social relations under which the work is being performed". These factors include "the social relations of the family, including the way in which women, and men, as part of a particular culture and society, interpret the responsibilities of motherhood" (Whitehead, 1990:457). In order to understand women's economic decision-making, it is necessary to determine how women perceive their interests and to consider how these relate to their position within the family and the household. In this connection, as was noted above, Whitehead attempts to fill the gap that has emerged between

models that treat the household as a unit wherein members share common goals and interests, and other models that imply a total separation of interests between women and men within the household. Although she warns that “it is unhelpful to treat a wife as wholly submerged in the household”, she challenges the view that the economic separation between husbands and wives is total (Whitehead, 1990).

The important point for development planning arising from the discussion above is that women’s perceptions of their economic interests must be accepted as valid and taken into consideration in the planning process. What social relations analysis aims to provide is a sensitive reading of the intricate social relations through which women and men live their lives, the findings of which can aid development planners to tailor interventions more appropriately. Where resources are directed to women, for example, an effort must be made to consider whether, in subverting existing gender relations, targeted interventions will ultimately enhance women’s status or, by undermining certain familial or community rights to which they were traditionally entitled, place them in a more vulnerable position.

In view of the importance that social relations analysis attributes to power relations, further attention needs to be given to the **process** through which more equitable power-sharing between the genders is to be achieved. There is consensus among proponents of social relations analysis that redistributing resources between the genders will involve conflict, losses for some and gains for others. If this is the case, how will men be convinced to re-negotiate power relations, given the pervasiveness of the gender system so well documented by the social relations analysis? Although this theme is not fully developed in the literature, perhaps one way of overcoming this dilemma is to focus on the dynamic nature of social relations. Social relations are not static. As social relations analysis attempts to demonstrate, the conflictual and collaborative aspects of gender relations involve men and women in a constant process of negotiation and re-negotiation. The priority for those interested in improving women’s status, therefore, must be to provide women with greater bargaining power within this process.

In this context, whereas the gender roles framework and the “gender efficiency approach” highlight the importance of directing economic resources to women, the centrality of the power dimension of gender relations has led some advocates of social relations analysis to highlight the need for action-oriented political strategies to bring about women’s “empowerment” (Kabeer, 1992; K. Young, 1993). This marks an important shift in terrain from the technical concerns of policy makers and planners to the political arena *per se*. Kabeer hints at the logic behind this shift:

Because there are risks and costs incurred in any process of change, such change must be believed in, initiated, and directed by those whose interests it is meant to serve. Empowerment cannot be given, it must be self-generated. All that a gender-transformative policy can hope to do is to provide women with the enabling resources which will allow them to take greater control of their own lives, to determine what kinds of gender relations they would want to live within, and to devise the strategies and alliances to help them get there (Kabeer, 1994: 97).

The policy implications of social relations analysis, therefore, involve the political project of women's self-empowerment. In contrast to the top-down planning approach of the "gender efficiency" and gender roles frameworks, emphasis is placed on women's NGOs and "participatory" planning (Kabeer, 1992:36). Below we consider some of the implications of this shift to the arena of politics.

Empowerment, NGOs and collective action

NGOs have long been active in the development field and have gained increasing prominence in recent years. Women's NGOs have been no exception to this general rule. Throughout the 1980s, as the efficacy of central planning came under question and as the ideological discrediting of "the state" gained momentum, NGOs were embraced by donor governments and multilateral funding agencies as partners in development. This shift in thinking was also reflected in the growing proportion of development funding handled by the NGO sector. In Africa, for instance, about half of World Bank development funds for 1993 were channelled through NGOs (UNRISD, 1994). At the same time, there has been a significant change in the development agenda away from a preoccupation with economic issues towards an emphasis on political and institutional problems. Human rights, good governance and participation have thus gained prominence.

For gender policy advocates, the emphasis on NGOs has entailed a number of contradictory implications. On the one hand, the early and current critique of the project approach by some of these advocates and the efforts at mainstreaming gender at the macro-economic level seem to be at odds with the NGO approach to development, which is essentially project-oriented and often "anti-state". On the other hand, the rhetoric of "empowerment" and "bottom-up development" has much appeal, for reasons that are explained below. In fact, as was noted in the previous section, women and development advocates differ in the extent to which they see a role for NGOs and collective action — in part a reflection of their underlying assumptions about the nature of women's subordination. Those using social relations analysis, for example, tend to see a more critical need for empowerment strategies at the grassroots level, while gender efficiency advocates rely more heavily on changing the conceptual frameworks used by planners and policy makers.

It is unfortunate that the shortcomings of the project approach to development have not received sufficient attention within the women and development literature. The “welfare approach” came to signify all that was wanting in early development practice vis-à-vis women. The term “welfare” in this context became short-hand for a number of overlapping lacunae: first, an undue emphasis on women’s reproductive roles (and the neglect of their productive work); second, a view of women as passive beneficiaries (as opposed to active agents); and most importantly, the relegation of women’s issues to marginalized and under-funded projects (rather than their incorporation into mainstream development programmes and policies).

One outcome of this lack of conceptual clarity has been that most of the blame for failure was placed at the door of “welfare” (in fact welfare became a synonym for failure), when it should have been more clearly directed at the project approach *per se* — regardless of whether its objectives were welfare or production oriented. Localized impact (even where successful) rather than broad coverage, efficiency losses due to the tendency for duplication and lack of co-ordination, difficulty in reaching certain groups of people (very often the more disadvantaged), and inability to control the negative fall-outs of other general policies — these are some of the main limitations of the project approach that the development literature has been highlighting.

On the other hand, what seems to have fuelled the recent enthusiasm for NGOs within women and development circles relates, at least in part, to their encounters with the world of public institutions. The 20-year experience of women and development advocates trying to engender public institutions and their policies (through women’s bureaux, WID focal points and gender training) has been a frustrating, and very often disappointing, one. It is not surprising therefore to find the NGO rhetoric of “bottom-up development” being taken up not only by the institutional outsiders (i.e., activists and academics), but also by advocates working within mainstream development institutions.

Caroline Moser, an influential gender planner, is one insider to concede that “[c]hange instigated through ‘top-down’ interventions of the state as the dominant ‘structure’ of power, control and domination is distinct from change achieved through bottom-up mobilization of ‘agency’ in civil society”. Since the success of gender planning depends on the participation of women, “it is the organization of women within civil society that requires examination”. She then goes on to describe how NGOs can make planning an “emancipatory process”: “[b]ecause of their capacity to reach the ‘grass-roots’ where ‘real people’ are ... NGOs have increasingly been identified as the institutional solution for ‘alternative’ development models. (1993:191; all inverted commas in original).

Similarly, Kate Young sees NGOs as a channel through which planners can be kept informed of women’s needs and priorities so that women’s views constitute essential inputs into the revision of projects and plans. In this way NGOs can fill a missing link in efforts to integrate gender

into development planning. "Government works best when it is responsive to and accountable to the bulk of the population"; NGOs can play an important part in "promoting the interests of the citizenry" (K. Young, 1993:162). The common assumption here seems to be that policy makers are most responsive to pressures of a political nature, and that to be able to exert such pressure women need to get themselves organized. NGOs are thus entrusted with the task of reaching the least privileged and the poorest women, helping them strengthen their existing organizational capacities, or facilitating group formation (since the poorest often have the least structural capacity for organization).

Women's power is thus premised on a collective notion of empowerment, targeting in particular the poorest and the least privileged groups. The collective empowerment of poor women means enabling them "to take control of their own lives to set their own agendas, to organize to help each other and make demands on the state for support and on society itself for change" (K. Young, 1993:158). Young, in fact, is among the few advocates of empowerment who is clear about the competitive nature of power. Critical of the neo-liberal thinking that people empower themselves "by pulling themselves up by their bootstraps", she emphasizes the conflictual nature of power: "empowerment is not just about women acquiring something, but about those holding power relinquishing it" (K. Young, 1993:158).

Young, like many other advocates, recognizes the importance of more practical NGO initiatives as a means of politicizing women's issues. It is frequently argued that when women get organized, either spontaneously or through the mediation of an NGO, to demand and/or arrange for the provision of their basic needs (e.g. water, sanitation, or a cash income), this can initiate an "emancipatory process". In the process of engaging in welfare-oriented schemes, a space is created for "consciousness raising" and organizational capacity building. Women thereby become active agents in questioning their social position and organizing to bring an end to discriminatory practices.

As an example of how meeting a practical need (for cash) can have a transformational potential or serve a strategic interest, Young (1993:156) cites the example of producer co-operatives.²⁸ Forming a locally-based production group can provide the conditions for an empowering experience if space is provided for discussion and exchange of experiences, and an examination of the roots of women's poverty and powerlessness. This model is regarded as superior to both piece-rate and factory work, since the former tends to reinforce women's isolation and in the latter men tend to occupy positions of power and authority.

Similarly, in DAWN's (Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era) classification of women's organizations, among the most promising are grassroots organizations that originate from the economic and material conditions women experience. They very often focus on meeting women's practical needs, relating not only to income but also to health and education. Through this they raise consciousness and engage in advocacy, legal struggles and political action (Sen and Grown,

1988:92). Like Kate Young, the DAWN network also recognizes the importance of women's movements that have come together around basic needs such as fuel and water, and in response to urban crises such as loss of services or inflation (e.g. the Latin American shantytown women's organizations).

Thus there are two main themes emerging from the literature on women's empowerment that deserve closer scrutiny: first, the role of NGOs in facilitating bottom-up development; and second, the notion of collective action.

Bottom-up development and NGO strategies

The women and development empowerment literature argues that a stronger and more diverse civil society will lead to a more representative and accountable government, which will be more likely to implement equitable development policies. As a general vision of how society should be organized, few people would refute the desirability of having accountable and transparent policy-making institutions and bureaucracies, and strong organizations that can represent and empower the poor. But in order to turn that vision into reality, what should be the intermediate strategies of NGOs? The convergence of strategic and practical issues within the women and development empowerment literature provides some insights.

Since it is difficult to engineer social movements, the intermediate strategy is to use NGOs as catalysts to bring together those most deeply affected by change, help them understand/articulate their situation, and assist them in building their organizational capacities. However, given the difficulties in carrying out consciousness-raising and organizational capacity building in a vacuum, some advocates have come to appreciate the practical issues around which women can be brought together. Most of these practical initiatives are essentially projects with welfare (health, education, sanitation) or production (micro-enterprises) objectives. How are these initiatives going to be different from the much-despised women's income generating projects that littered many developing countries during the Women's Decade?

Even though there is no explicit discussion of this question, it is clear from the literature that the main difference lies in NGOs' "organizational capacities" and their "visions and perspectives" (Sen and Grown, 1988:89). This will presumably take them beyond the project approach and enable them to provide the "missing link" in efforts to integrate gender into development planning (i.e., make planning participatory or bottom-up). It is also important to note here that these gender policy advocates do not premise their arguments for NGO involvement in development (e.g. welfare provisioning, service delivery, or productive employment) on a neo-liberal critique of the state. Where they do see a role for NGOs, it is in an advocacy capacity — in "creating space" for women to help them articulate their demands and bring pressure on the state; in other words, to make the policy-making process more responsive to the needs of women.

For women's organizations to play a key role in participatory planning, they must, however, meet a number of conditions. First, the organizations that are concerned with working with the poor and delivering services or other benefits to them are urged to "look very stringently at their own mechanisms of participation, democratic decision-making and accountability" (K. Young, 1993:164; Sen and Grown, 1988:89). Second, women's organizations are advised to seek financial resources, training (management, leadership formation or conflict resolution), and access to information. Third, they must play a role in the wider social movements by building alliances, thereby avoiding isolation and marginalization.

The problem with these recommendations is their level of generality. Individuals struggling within organizations to set their own understanding of what women's "true interests" are on the organization are not likely to change their strategies simply by a recommendation that they strive for democratic decision-making. The difficulties in developing guidelines that are any more specific are due in large part to the wide range of circumstances in which local organizations operate (Vivian, 1993). In fact, Sen and Grown are quite clear: they claim neither that they have "all the answers to the problems, nor that there are unique solutions to them". The solutions, they assert, "have to be worked out at the local level by the groups themselves" (Sen and Grown, 1988:95).

Although some NGOs have created more "space" for women's voices to be heard — either by using participatory methodologies in the process of needs identification or by operating with an open rather than closed agenda — this seems to be the exception rather than the rule. A survey of women in producer co-operatives in West Bengal, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu provides some illustration of what the potential pitfalls can be (Mayoux, 1995).²⁹

Influenced by Gandhian ideology, the co-operative model has had a long history of official promotion in India as part of small-scale industrial policy. Numerous co-operatives have also been set up by "radical" NGOs and women's organizations as part of an explicit strategy of "empowerment". The interesting point emerging from this survey is not so much that success was rare, but rather the wide gap between the rigid co-operative model that was being imposed by the implementing/funding agencies (state and NGO alike) and the needs and priorities of many of the intended beneficiaries.

The stated goal of these agencies was that women should work together in a co-operative workshop and market products collectively with some form of participatory decision-making structure. But the cost in terms of time spent in decision-making was in fact a major disincentive for many women, particularly the poorer ones who would have preferred to spend that time earning a wage. Moreover, the requirement that production should take place in a co-operative workshop, which was meant to break down the strictures of *purdah* and build support networks between women, proved to be a disincentive for many of the younger women who

had young children at home. Many men and women stated a preference for working at home, both because of the greater flexibility to combine production with other tasks and also because of the difficulties in making houses secure against theft when all family members were absent. Moreover, working outside the home did not bring forth the intended sharing of domestic work; in fact, it imposed extra costs on the women workers (in terms of time and money spent on transport).

It is not clear whether projects implemented by NGOs are any more successful than those being run by public institutions, at least on the basis of purely economic criteria (i.e. levels of income earned, regularity of employment and economic survival). As for the non-quantifiable criteria of success emphasized by gender policy advocates, although NGOs have shown themselves to be flexible and innovative in some contexts, pressures to justify donor funding seem to have led to an expansion of standardized and ill-thought out projects, which link NGOs to some of the same problems associated with state interventions — inefficiency, bureaucratic rigidity and lack of sensitivity to local peculiarities and the needs of beneficiaries (UNRISD, 1994). A recent UNRISD study on NGO activities in Zimbabwe confirms many of these shortcomings (Vivian and Maseko, 1994). Moreover, as NGOs take on more of the activities and responsibilities that states have hitherto assumed, they are likely to become even more susceptible to these pitfalls.

Collective action

The process of bottom-up development promoted by some women and development advocates hinges on collective action. In this context, NGOs are seen as playing a central role in organizing women for collective action. It was indicated above that unrealistic expectations are being placed on the capacity of NGOs to engage in bottom-up development. Are similar assumptions being made about NGOs and collective action? One way to approach this question is by looking at NGOs as institutions. Feminist scholarship has made a significant contribution to the understanding of institutions — the critique of conventional models of the household, and the more recent literature on state bureaucracies and national and international agencies being among the more significant.³⁰

Are the same analytical tools useful for understanding women's organizations and feminist collective action? It is our contention that the application of an analysis of social relations is useful and that it involves: first, the disaggregation of the category of "women"; second, seeing women and men bound up in a web of conflictual **and** co-operative relationships; and third, an understanding of gender "interests" as socially and historically constructed, and continually reformulated. There is an obvious tension between a "gendered" analysis along the lines suggested and some strands of populist feminist thinking that are dominant in the collective action literature.

First, the category of "women" is problematic, in the sense that it needs to be disaggregated: in addition to class, women are also divided by age

and life cycle, not to mention nationality, race, ethnicity, religion and sexual preference. The discussion of multiple identities evidently leads to the vexed notion of interests. Because women are positioned within society according to a variety of different criteria, the interests they have in common as a group are similarly shaped in complex and sometimes conflicting ways; it is therefore difficult, if not impossible, to generalize about the interests of women (Molyneux, 1985). Although it would be a fair generalization to say that all women experience subordination, the fact that subordination has multiple causes and is extremely variable across time and space means that it is not sufficient as the single criteria for explaining collective action.

Second, most women are members of households and perceive (wrongly or rightly) their interests to be bound up with those of other household members (especially their children). As noted in the discussion of social relations analysis, what determines women's contributions of labour to their husbands' plots, for example, is a complex of factors — not just benefits to themselves, but also the well-being of other household members, and the fulfilment of certain moral commitments that they perceive as important.

In some writings on women's organizations, the issue of heterogeneity is taken as the starting point. Young (1993) and Moser (1993), for example, both note that different forms of social stratification cut across each other and interact in complex ways, rendering the category of "women" a highly heterogeneous one (K. Young, 1993:150). They are far less willing, however, to see women's moral behaviour towards others (especially their children) and their loyalty to their families and households as "conscious" decisions on their part. Young, for example, argues that "[w]hile women are clearly active in trying to cope with the situation they find themselves in, it cannot be assumed that they have perfect knowledge or understanding of the economic, political and social context of their lives" (1993:143).

Women as individuals may well be aware of their subordinate position and powerlessness, but the force of ideology may render this 'natural' or 'God given'. Equally, even when it is recognized as social, the structural roots of discrimination and inequality are not always easily identified (K. Young, 1993:143).

From this perspective, the situation of women cannot be improved simply by "asking women themselves" what their interests are. The implication is that NGOs can create space in which individual women can begin "to break away from the highly circumscribed sphere of family, kin or village" and "to understand the role of ideology" in constructing their understanding of their experiences (K. Young, 1993:142). There is little recognition, however, that gender relations of family and kinship may entail some measure of security for women, for which they may be willing to give up individual autonomy and personal status. Within traditional familial and kinship relations, such as those of marriage, women are entitled to certain rights; they may therefore resist attempts at subverting these relations if a viable alternative is not made available to

them. The recognition that women — even poor women — have divided group loyalties and multiple identities and interests would help explain why they have not rallied around a common agenda to the extent that some activists would have liked to see.

Similar assumptions are implicit in some analyses of women's organizations. The issue of conflict, for example, is at times brushed aside, as women's groups are urged to become democratic. There seems to be little recognition that organizational politics and struggle are as likely in women-only organizations as in mixed-gender ones. In the same way that women take their gender identities with them into "impersonal" markets, they also take their other identities with them into women's organizations — making both conflict and hierarchy inevitable.³¹

By using "women" as a homogeneous category (like "the community" or "the peasants" in populist development discourse) and in searching for "the feminine" essence (non-hierarchical, conflict-free, etc.) as a guiding principle, much of the thinking on women's NGOs falls into a trap of denying the historical and cultural construction of gender. In other words, if difference and conflict among women are denied because of some underlying notion of common "real interests", the "problems" with feminist collective action will have to be explained by recourse to false consciousness. This, however, is a highly problematic start.

The recognition that the category of "women" is a very heterogeneous one does not mean that common interests cannot be found. In many societies women use kinship and non-kinship links to co-operate across households — farming each others' fields in rotation, helping with childcare, pooling their savings to cover for major life cycle events (such as marriage) or for productive investments (Harris, 1981; Moore, 1988:155-170). Many of these groups or arrangements are informal and have evolved as coping mechanisms through which women try to escape some of the constraints of their economic circumstances. In many cases they are highly specific to the socio-economic circumstances in which they operate.

Many formal women's NGOs organize around common interests identified by their members. Such organizations often bring together women from different social groups. Organizations working to aid victims of domestic violence provide one example of women's identification of common "interests". Women's trade union organizations provide another. SEWA (Self-Employed Women's Association), for example, was created in 1972 to fight for the rights of self-employed women workers (piece-rate workers and petty commodity producers) in India. As well as setting up a lending and savings bank, its focus has been on organizing isolated workers into a series of co-operatives with managers employed by SEWA. Westwood's (1991) study of SEWA's work highlights its success in generating and reproducing a collective consciousness among women workers. Unlike some of the literature on women's NGOs, however, Westwood does not underestimate the difficulties inherent to sustaining SEWA's work.

Overall, SEWA co-operatives have helped to strengthen a collective consciousness and a political will to be recognized as workers. Ironically, in meeting this goal, SEWA co-operatives undermine their own chances of survival. As Westwood puts it, “workers will not easily relinquish wages for a brave new world of enterprise” (1991:302). In one SEWA co-operative, for example, attempts to control productivity by moving from steady wages to a piece-rate system provoked a struggle between management and workers that exposed class tensions. The co-operatives find it very difficult to sustain the level of income generation needed to continue.

The emphasis on gaining recognition for women’s rights as workers leads to some interesting contradictions. Within the co-operatives women bargain for recognition of their “traditional” skills in weaving or hand-stitching, for example. The co-operatives often end up subsidizing women’s wages and the women workers resist moves to upgrade skills for entry into more lucrative luxury markets. In other words, women take the gender division of labour with them into the co-operatives: they tend to focus on certain trades (“women’s work”) and their work is still seen as unskilled outside the co-operatives. While the space SEWA provides self-employed women for solidarity and collective action is significant, its success in challenging the gender division of labour and the low value attached to women’s work beyond the co-operative is more limited. One strategy has been the legal fight for women’s access to space and goods in markets controlled by men (Westwood, 1991:305). But SEWA’s experience, with all its achievements, illustrates the fundamental point that civil society organizations cannot substitute for the powers that states have in regulating markets (UNRISD, 1994). Efforts at mainstreaming gender concerns into state policies should therefore remain high on the agenda of those striving for a more gender-egalitarian order.

The point of illustrating some of the limitations of women’s organizations is not to undermine the importance of the work being done by many of these groups. Rather, what we have tried to suggest in this section is that a more critical approach to the strengths and weaknesses of NGOs would help women and development advocates to clarify their thinking on “participatory planning” and “bottom-up” strategies. Is the present optimism of the role to be played by women’s NGOs justifiable? Are women’s NGOs any more likely to overcome problems encountered by women and development advocates within public institutions? Do bottom-up strategies not ultimately confront some of the same constraints and obstacles as those working from the top down? These are questions that deserve further consideration by women and development advocates. For example, one of the criticisms of top-down strategies found in the women and development empowerment literature is that Western donor agencies impose their assumptions and agendas on developing countries. In view of the growing proportion of donor funding being made available to NGOs, it is difficult to imagine how NGOs will resist becoming influenced by the objectives of donor agencies.

Concluding Remarks

This paper set out to examine some of the main trends in the way women's issues have been conceptualized in the context of development. One of the prominent themes emerging from our account has been a distinct strand of thinking, stretching from the early WID writings to the more recent "gender efficiency" theses, that combines arguments for gender justice with those of economic efficiency. While successful as a political strategy, in giving women visibility on the development agenda, it has also encouraged the tendency for women's demands from development to be sidelined.

One of the main tensions that emerges from our comparative account in part II is the extent to which the "social connectedness" or "togetherness" of husband and wife should be given analytical weight in analyses of gender relations. A pervasive feature of economic analyses of gender is to use analogies from elsewhere in the economic repertoire. Such analogies, however, tend to be misleading for the way they neglect gender ideologies and the moral dimensions of gender and familial relations. While some economists have begun to adjust their models to reflect the special features of "togetherness" that characterize conjugal and familial relations, others continue to work with the assumption that the interests of household members are completely separate.

Another central tension emerging from part II is the extent to which the goal of "gender-aware" development is to be linked to "top-down" or "bottom-up" strategies. Many women and development advocates now emphasize women's NGOs as key actors in development. The present enthusiasm for NGOs voiced by donors and governments in an effort to roll back the state should be approached with caution by women and development advocates. Women's NGOs have an important role to play in creating space for women to politicize their demands. But in encouraging NGOs to undertake projects with welfare or production objectives in the hope that this will "empower" women, advocates may be neglecting the need to bring pressure on the state to regulate macro-level forces in a more gender-equitable manner. It is with this goal in mind that possible points of convergence between top-down and bottom-up strategies should be explored by women and development advocates. Hence, in advocating support for women's NGOs, the objective of mainstreaming WID/GAD concerns should not be abandoned.

The shift from WID to GAD explored in this paper is based on our reading of a select body of literature. Although the gender discourse has filtered through to policy-making institutions, in this process actors have reinterpreted the concept of gender to suit their institutional needs. In some instances, "gender" has been used to side-step a focus on "women" and the radical policy implications of overcoming their disprivilege. The UNRISD reports³² on the experiences of states and donor agencies in mainstreaming gender document considerable confusion over the meaning of gender and the policy implications of the discursive shift from "women" to "gender". While the literature outlined above

examines the reasons for this analytical shift, the challenge facing planners and policy makers is to operationalize gender. If this challenge is not met, the discursive shift from WID to GAD, which is occurring in many development institutions, will continue to mystify the project of integrating gender into development policies.

Endnotes

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² Drawing on comments provided by Diane Elson (6 December 1994).

³ The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) set up a women in development office to promote these objectives — the first office of its kind.

⁴ This was contrasted with the more productive “traditional” farming technologies of plough agriculture, which used mainly male labour (characteristic of Asia).

⁵ In this paper, we use the term “women in development” (WID) to refer specifically to a particular approach to women and development issues that emerged during the 1970s, described above. By contrast, we use the term “women and development” more broadly to embrace all efforts directed at understanding and improving the situation of women in the development process, which includes WID as well as approaches using gender (i.e., GAD).

⁶ A deconstruction of Boserup's thesis can be found in Whitehead (1990).

⁷ The ILO's World Employment Conference in 1976, the basic needs strategies that followed, the anti-poverty orientation in multilateral and bilateral aid, and major direct poverty reduction measures adopted by many developing countries in their national programmes were the highlights of this period (Guhan, 1993).

⁸ Besides physical needs such as food, clothing, shelter and fuel, emphasis was also placed on social needs, i.e., education, human rights and “participation” through employment and political involvement (hence, basic **human** needs).

⁹ Much emphasis was placed on time-budget surveys. This, as Buvinic (1983) explains, is a strategy: by presenting women's issues in a quantitative language the communications barriers between economic theorists and practitioners would break down.

¹⁰ Johnson (1988) provides a summary of such research.

¹¹ For a feminist critique of NHE see Evans (1989).

¹² For references and a discussion of this literature see Moore (1988: Chapter 2).

¹³ The need to distinguish between gender as a social construct and gender as social relation was raised by Ann Whitehead on an earlier draft of this paper.

¹⁴ The term “gender roles framework” is not always used but the general theoretical approach is the same.

¹⁵ The gender roles framework has led to the formulation of guidelines, checklists and impact statements for integrating gender at the project level. Moser (1993:155-169) examines the variety of planning procedures to operationalize gender concerns.

¹⁶ Goetz and Sen Gupta (1994) find the phenomenon of male appropriation to be more significant than what had been hitherto reported for credit programmes in Bangladesh.

¹⁷ This is how neo-classical economists have described the time needed for adjustment policies to work, i.e., for the changes in relative prices to bring forth the switch in resource use.

¹⁸ Tradables are those commodities that can be traded in international markets, i.e., export commodities and import substitutes (the latter, if protected, should lose their protection during adjustment so their prices will fall to internationally tradable levels). Non-tradables are goods and services that cannot be traded internationally (e.g. transport, housing).

¹⁹ Similarly, Elson (1993) and Folbre (1994) urge a radical rethinking of efficiency to take account of costs in the “unpaid economy”, placing the reproduction of human beings on centre stage. But, as it will become clear, their understanding of markets is quite different from Palmer's.

²⁰ A more radical means of reducing market distortion would be through “counterbalancing distortions”; for example, making women a priority group for small

and informal sector employment support services, such as information, training and credit lines; or discrimination against males in user charges for both education and health facilities (Palmer, 1991:158-160).

²¹ The services would be paid for through an employment tax on all enterprises listed on the companies register (Palmer, 1991:165).

²² Mackintosh (1990:47) makes a similar observation about many of World Bank's policy studies.

²³ Based on comments provided by Yusuf Bangura (personal communication, 2 November 1994).

²⁴ The following paragraphs draw heavily on Lockwood's (1992) critique of Collier.

²⁵ Social relations analysis is often associated with researchers working in connection with the Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex. Our discussion of social relations analysis, as a training framework, draws heavily on the work of Naila Kabeer, Ann Whitehead and Kate Young. But social relations analysis as a general analytical approach underpins a much wider body of literature on gender issues.

²⁶ Kabeer (1994) outlines an analytical framework for using a social relations perspective in development policy and planning.

²⁷ One such institution is marriage, the socially elaborated terms of exchange and cooperation of which are embodied in what Whitehead (1981) calls the "conjugal contract".

²⁸ The practical/strategic distinction was first introduced by Molyneux (1985), and is used widely in women and development planning and policy circles.

²⁹ The survey is based on the author's in-depth field research from 1984-1987 in West Bengal, and from 1989-1991 in Karnataka and Tamil Nadu.

³⁰ On the former see, in particular, Folbre (1986), Evans (1989) and Kabeer (1991); on the latter see Goetz (1992), Kandiyoti (1991), Mohanty et al. (1991) and various contributions in Staudt (1990).

³¹ Some have argued that hierarchical (and bureaucratic) means are antithetical to feminist ends (Ferguson, cited in G. Young, 1990). It is now widely recognized that women's organizations are beset with problems of hierarchy. One of the consequences of the idea that all "hierarchy is bad" has been lack of structure within women's organizations and the emergence of charismatic leadership. Women (like men) have real difficulty in creating and maintaining organizations that are participatory, conflict-free and functional (Yudelman, cited in G. Young, 1990).

³² Several of these reports, prepared in the context of the UNRISD project on Integrating Gender into Development Policy, will be brought out in 1995 as Occasional Papers for the Fourth World Conference on Women, to be held in Beijing in September 1995. Draft versions of some of these forthcoming Occasional Papers have been drawn upon in this paper and are listed in the bibliography.

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