

Concept Note for the Gender and Development Studies Discipline

Development policies and practices have a differential impact on women and men. This necessitates an understanding of the “gender gap” in access to resources, privileges, entitlements and choices. Consensus has evolved around the need to explore the “gender gap” in key development sectors and how this gap can be bridged in order to achieve gender equality and empowerment of women. There is now greater emphasis on mainstreaming gender perspectives into the development process. This will contribute to building a gender-sensitive rubric of development, recasting development theory and action in the “direction of improved living standards, socially responsible management and use of resources, elimination of gender subordination and socioeconomic inequality as well as to promote the organizational restructuring required to bring about desirable change.”

The discipline of Gender and Development Studies mainstreamed by various universities world over has been shaped by the evolution of changing perspectives and approaches to gender and development. The major schools of thought in women’s development, that is, Women in Development (WID), Woman and Development (WAD) and Gender and Development (GAD), represent the growing recognition that women are an integral part of their societies and that sustainable development must necessarily include their full and equal participation. In the late 1980’s, GAD approach was developed with the idea of improving the development model by removing disparities in social, economic and political balances between men and women as a precondition for achieving people- centered development. It focused on the socially constructed basis of difference between men and women and the need to challenge existing gender roles and relations as they have systematically subordinated women. This was a major departure from earlier approaches of WID and, which perceived women’s problem in terms of their biological or class differences rather than gender. In other words, unlike WID, GAD approach created a field and, finally, an area of studies from which the discipline of GAD emerged, clearly focusing on the fact that one need not merely focus on women in a their biological singularity, but with the way in which society assigns roles, responsibilities and expectations to both men and women. Gender and Development as a discipline applies gender analysis to uncover the ways in which men and women work together. GAD policies thus, challenge the traditional gender roles which sustain and foster inequality getting reflected in development policies. By way of challenging inequalities, Beijing Platforms for Action established Gender Mainstreaming in 1995 as a strategy across all policy areas, at all levels of Government, for achieving gender equality.

Exploration of gender issues has become an important activity for most non-governmental organizations also. Increasing emphasis is being laid in Governmental agencies on establishing gender differential impacts and taking positive, affirmative action towards gender equality and equity. It is now widely acknowledged that gender considerations need to be reflected in all development plans, programmes and policies. There is growing concern over the isolation of women in so-called “soft” sectors in education, employment and development rather than

mainstreaming gender concerns across all organizations, institutions and activities. While the concerns are clearly articulated, national goals and the UN millennium development goals cannot be achieved without concrete effort towards gender equality. Achieving gender equality and gender equity requires multi-pronged approaches and strategies. The strong focus envisaged on positive affirmative action would be of considerable significance.

It is surmised, if sustainable development is to be achieved, an engendered approach to development policy and practice is essential. The shift from a focus on women in isolation to a focus on gender, ensure a more comprehensive view of cooperation and conflict through a “gender lens”. Of key concern are inequalities in the division of responsibilities, and access to and control over resources. Gender relations within the household are an important mediator of life outcomes, as are gender relations within other institutions such as the community, market, corporate sector and state. UN initiatives have strengthened development organizations’ commitment to addressing emerging concerns in achieving gender equality through the implementation of human right as well. Bilateral, multilaterals and NGOs/VOs have recognized the need to collaborate and coordinate their work to tackle these concerns.

For many organizations ‘gender equality policy evaporation’ is a critical problem-commitment on paper fail to be implemented. The spread of responsibility and accountability for gender quality issues is the key to better implementation, backed up with capacity building. This works at all institutional levels including within development agencies themselves. The issue of gendered impacts needs detailed study.

An increasing volume of research, academic discussions and publications are being devoted to gender analysis, gender budgeting and gender mainstreaming and sector-wide approaches in development organizations. Some of the key themes in sector-wide approaches include poverty, gender-specific aspects of globalization, education, health, agriculture, macroeconomics (including trade), gender budgets, livelihoods and empowerment, knowledge management, information and communication technologies, conflicts and emergencies, environment and ecology, international covenants, governance, violence, men and masculinities in relation to gender and development. These, among other themes, form critical dimensions of the gender and development discourse. The discipline of gender and development studies focuses on building the analytical and conceptual skills needed to understand gender concerns across development sectors, exploring the dynamics of gender and development-related research, policymaking and implementation. A student who explores this discipline would be able to critically analyze gender as it relates to development theory and policy; distill relevant information from a body of knowledge relating to theoretical and conceptual issues in gender and development; and demonstrate originality in the use of practical skills in research methods, project design, policy analysis, and other key areas of analysis of development interventions.

