



Amplifying Women's Voices: The Imperative and Impact of Inclusive Development Policies with examples

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Abstract. Gender equality and women's empowerment are fundamental principles in contemporary development policies. This essay explores the intrinsic link between developing policies and enhancing women's voices in the context of gender justice and sustainable development. It traces the evolution from the Women in Development (WID) approach to the Gender and Development (GAD) perspective, emphasizing the importance of addressing the root causes of gender inequality. The essay additionally explores the dynamics of the redistribution and recognition perspectives in gender justice, emphasising their mutually supportive characteristics. Furthermore, it underscores the significance of women's participation in development policies, demonstrating how their inclusion leads to more comprehensive and effective outcomes. Examples from India's forest conservation and Ethiopia's sustainable development initiatives illustrate how women's voices can be empowered through policy measures. The paper concludes by stressing the vital role of development policies in advancing women's progress and advocating for a concerted global effort to address gender disparities, recognizing that every step toward gender equality is a step toward human progress.

Keywords: Gender inequality, Development policies, Sustainable development

1 Introduction

In development policies, it is vital to consider gender, equality, women's experience, and justice. Development policies that are gender-sensitive and incorporate these values within policymaking - and thus the policies' outcomes - can further enhance women's empowerment. Gender inequality is one of society's most pervasive and far-reaching forms of inequality. It can take different forms in different places and even be pervasive across different groups within a society, depending on factors like race, class, caste, religion, and other similar issues ^[15]. This essay argues that developing policies and enhancing women's voices are intrinsically linked.

This essay traces the critical contribution of the Gender and Development Approach (GAD), which has been in vogue since the 1980s. The GAD approach has addressed the underlying causes of gender inequality by recognizing how the overlap of power relations, socio-economic factors, and stereotypes contribute to the persis-

tence of unequal development policies for women ^[9]. Furthermore, the contribution of the Women in Development (WID) approach inaugurated the need to focus on addressing the importance of gender in development.

However, based on the later developments and contributions from feminist vantages, it is now widely accepted that merely calling for women's development is not enough ^[4]. Women's voices must be enhanced. It is necessary to examine the root causes of gender inequality and the interdependence of several social, economic, cultural, and political factors for a more nuanced framework to promote development. Women's participation in critical developmental processes like decision-making and governance can create improved policy outcomes ^[24]. Therefore, this essay uses examples of forest conservation in India and sustainable development in Ethiopia to demonstrate how and why women's voices can be enhanced through development policies.

2 Gender and Development Policies

2.1 The Meanings of Redistribution and Recognition Stances

The genesis for the intermingling of development policies and gender can be traced to the more extensive debate surrounding the question of what must constitute justice for women. Broadly, the debate has given birth to two viewpoints. The first represents those who approach gender justice through a policy of redistribution, and the second viewpoint is from those who assert the approach of recognition. The redistribution approach in gender justice and development policies refers to seeking social and economic policies for women that promote gender equality and a general redistribution of resources ^[13]. The recognition approach emphasizes recognizing and respecting the differences between men and women, as well as the various responsibilities they perform in society ^[22].

The redistribution approach claims that economic inequality makes women disadvantaged in society. Therefore, the redistribution approach suggests that if the economic disparity is addressed adequately, gender inequality can be bridged via development policies such as affirmative action, the minimum wage for women, and universal healthcare packages ^[14]. On the other hand, the recognition approach to gender justice asserts that economic inequality alone cannot explain gender inequality and discrimination. Instead, deep-seated cultural and social norms have contributed to gender discrimination, such as cultural beliefs about gender roles, patriarchy, and the subjugation of women. The recognition development policies advocate the establishment of anti-discrimination laws, campaigns against gendered violence, and the promotion of inclusivity and diversity in society ^[23].

2.2 The Dynamics of Redistribution and Recognition Stances

Fraser ^[13] argues that the shift towards recognition rather than the economic struggle for redistribution has created two problems related to displacement and reification. Regarding the former problem, it is believed that the struggle for recognition ignores

the struggle for economic redistribution, which can lead to a neglect of economic issues to make way for recognition. At the same time, the recognition approach can also reify or solidify group identities [2]. This solidification of group identity occurs because the politics of recognition often assume that identities based on gender, race, and sexuality are static; indeed, they are static to the extent that they visualize the differences between various groups rather than acknowledging the more structural causes of inequality in society. In groups, complexities are not adequately considered by the recognition approach. In many ways, it is evident from the views above that recognition and redistribution approaches are more complementary than opposing [7].

3 From Women in Development (WID) to Gender and Development (GAD)

Conceptual shifts have brought the recognition and redistribution approaches together for a meaningful enhancement of women's voices via development policy. Miller and Razavi [19] note that in the 1970s, the Women in Development (WID) approach emerged, which focused on women's participation in the formal economy (p. 3). However, even though it was a step forward in the direction of recognizing the importance of gender in development, it eventually failed to address the underlying causes of gender discrimination, inequality, and stigma. The approach ignored the broader social, cultural, and political factors that caused gender inequality, such as patriarchy and social discrimination [19]. In many ways, the Women in Development approach embodied redistribution and remained.

It is confined to assuring tokenistic efforts without examining the more deep-rooted causes of gender inequality.

Contrary to this approach, the emergence of the Gender and Development (GAD) school of thought in the 1980s can be seen as an outgrowth of WID but with broader and more holistic aims. In other words, the GAD approach sought to examine the underlying causes of gender issues by acknowledging the interconnected social, economic, and cultural factors that create gender inequality [19]. As a result of the appearance of GAD, the notion of recognition was addressed. It also aimed to discuss issues like power relations and unequal balance, stereotypes against gender minorities, discrimination, and the diversity of women's experiences as a heterogeneous group.

Consequently, the shift from Women in Development to Gender and Development was significant in studying development and how gender was positioned within it. Over time, several feminist contributions have further complicated the GAD approach and the general realm of women and development. Kabeer [15] argues that despite many concerns and shortcomings, feminist writings have nonetheless challenged the dominant economic growth paradigm and neoliberalism that used to overlook how economic policies and market relationships perpetuated gender inequality and fuelled poverty.

One of the critical contributions of feminist scholarship has also been to draw attention to women's unpaid care work. Kabeer [15] shows that feminist writers argue for policies that value this work and advocate for policies that consider women's needs.

Furthermore, scholarship has recently played a vital role in overturning the assumptions about development being a neutral and objective process. In other words, development can impact different women in different ways. By highlighting the voices of marginalized women, feminist scholarship has also led to a more participatory process for development.

4 The Importance of Women's Participation in Development Policies

4.1 Social Benefits

Women's voices are crucial in international development policies and actions. For example, Balakrishnan ^[3] has suggested that regarding environmental policy, it is essential to include women's voices because women have intimate knowledge of their ecosystems. Their meaningful participation can be vital for achieving sustainable development goals and tackling climate change. Therefore, listening to women's voices creates more comprehensive policies. Development policies often require broad participation and feedback to generate more comprehensive policies that meet the needs of all members of society ^[25]. If women do not have an adequate voice or participation in decision-making, policies may ignore women's specific needs and interests, resulting in less comprehensive and less effective policies.

Moreover, the involvement of women in decision-making brings better governance to the wider society. Nielsen and Huse ^[20] and their team found that increasing women's participation in government can lead to better governance, including improved transparency, accountability, and responsiveness to citizens' needs. For instance, Burnett's ^[8] paper showed that women's active involvement in Rwanda's government affairs had reduced the errors in, and complaints against, new policies. Their participation also creates a peaceful and moderate social atmosphere to heal the trauma of early genocide. Hence, women's engagement in development policies not only raises people's satisfaction with government affairs but also leads to greater public trust in government institutions and better outcomes for society.

Lastly, the increasing number of women's engagement in policymaking inspires and empowers more women to participate in politics and public life. This can help to create a virtuous cycle of increased participation and representation, leading to a more diverse and inclusive democracy ^[5]. The example from sub-Saharan Africa indicated that local women representatives in the government promote gender equity inside the political circles and thus further raise public awareness regarding women-related policies ^[10].

4.2 Advocating Women's Voices in Developing Countries

In developing countries, development policies could arouse women's commitment to civil society. Weinberger and Jütting ^[30] followed two projects carried out by UNDP in Kashmir and Chad, which aimed to increase women's status and protect their

rights. They discovered that the local government tended to ignore females' interests due to regional and historical traditions. Therefore, women did not properly realize their legal rights, e.g., voting rights. Nobody had told them about their entitlement or educated them about anti-discrimination laws. Based on the previous finding, Stockemer, and Byrne ^[26] suggested that development policies such as providing fair education opportunities can raise women's awareness towards gender equality. Thus, it encourages them to participate in social activities under the protection of government law, ultimately pushing the progress of structural change.

Moreover, development policies provide platforms for women to express their voices. Many developing countries established specific departments working with NGOs to handle women's affairs. For instance, the National Council for Women in Egypt collaborated with the New Woman Foundation to set up women's communication channels and discuss platforms for locals to express their opinions and concerns ^[27]. The authority held various types of community meetings in town halls and universities to listen to their sentiments. The campaign resulted in a huge success, with over 3 million Egyptian women participating. A further plan has been proposed to extend the project into rural areas ^[12]. Accordingly, these platforms can provide a safe space for women to share their thoughts and ideas and facilitate their participation in the decision-making process.

Furthermore, development policies strengthen women's leadership skills, helping them to take on leadership roles in their communities and contribute to the decision-making process. Dated back to the early stage of feminist development, Danmark argued that women's social status and reputation could be enhanced by providing them with management roles. Kubu's ^[16] survey supports this claim. She interviewed over 60 women leaders in developing countries and all of them recognized that their leadership role had a positive impact on the wider status of women. Therefore, introducing development policies, such as providing leadership training to women, avail the spread and enlargement of women's voices ^[22]. The increase of women leaders challenges traditional gender roles and stereotypes that portray women as weak and passive.

Nonetheless, development policies do not always benefit the development of women's progress. On some occasions, the implementation of poor policies even hinders the advancement of women's liberation. From the 1980s to the 1990s, the IMF and World Bank cooperated with African countries to implement new economic policies to stabilize their financial system and reshape their economic structure ^[18]. Yet, during the policymaking process, framers overlooked women's interests because of the lack of participation. Hence, the policies resulted in cuts to social spending and public services, including education and healthcare ^[11]. This disproportionately affected women and girls, who often have less access to education and healthcare than men.

5 Women and Development Policy: Examples from India and Ethiopia

Gender justice broadly entails the practices to end the inequalities between women and men that are often reinforced in the household, community, and state. It requires mainstream institutions like justice and policymaking to be accountable for tackling injustice and exclusion against women in society. Development can enhance women's voices, and women's increased role in development policymaking is also essential for women's empowerment. For example, women's participation in forest governance and conservation in countries like India has created positive, sustainable outcomes for better forest management practices ^[1].

5.1 Women and Environmental Protection Policies in India

For a long time now, the role of women in environmental management and conservation has been recognized. It is believed that their deep knowledge of local ecosystems and the fact that women are disproportionately affected by environmental degradation motivate women to be included in developmental decision-making ^[3]. When women are excluded from decision-making and forest management policies, these often end up leaving out the needs and priorities of women. Ultimately, it can lead to unsustainable practices and environmental degradation. As Agarwal ^[1] has shown, women's participation in community forest governance in India has created scope for better forest management practices like sustainable harvesting and reforestation. It has also considerably brought down the instances of illegal logging and environmental degradation.

However, women's participation can often be hindered due to social and cultural barriers like prevalent gender roles and a restriction of women's mobility in public spaces. Terry ^[28] argues that climate change and gender justice intersect in a way that climate change affects women more, and gender inequalities magnify the effect of climate change on women (p. 7). Therefore, development policies and programs must be designed to promote women's participation in climate and environmental governance actively.

5.2 The Ethiopian Experience: Women and Development Policy for Sustainability

In Ethiopia, women have several barriers to accessing education, healthcare, and economic roles. Nevertheless, in the sustainable development goals (SDGs) and millennium development goals (MDGs), gender equality has been accorded a significant position. In Ethiopia, many policy measures towards women's empowerment in sustainable development and poverty reduction have been taken in recent years ^[21]. Gender equality and women's empowerment have been acknowledged as top priorities for the least-developed countries like Ethiopia, which are working towards poverty reduction and sustainable development goals.

However, Ogato ^[21] has noted that many challenges in Ethiopia hinder the development process and women's empowerment. Such difficulties that women face include the traditional gender norms in the country, limited access to education for women, and a high dropout rate from education. At the same time, women in Ethiopia face limited economic opportunities to secure formal jobs and high wages due to a lack of training alongside hiring discrimination. Luckily, this situation has started to change. Recent policy developments like the Women's Development Army - a government-led initiative - have enabled women to gain training and access to fields like health, entrepreneurship, and agriculture ^[6].

In Ethiopia, sustainable development depends on a comprehensive approach that can bring recognition and redistribution together to enable women to be agents of change. Ogato ^[21] has shown that some successful steps in this direction include policies and programs that promote gender equality, like increased political representation of women, the establishment of women's cooperatives, and the provision of credit services. A combination of private, government, and community-based initiatives can enable women's voices to be enhanced through development policies.

6 Conclusion

As the former U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton once said: "Women's progress is human progress." ^[17] The voices of women must be heard and raised during the policymaking process. These voices not only help to mitigate against the potential shortcomings of policy but also improve the applicability of policies. From the case studies of India and Ethiopia, we can see how women's power generates new ideas to fight against climate change and injustice.

This paper also addresses how development policies benefit women's movements and enhance their social status. Development policies raise women's commitment to civil society and provide platforms for women to express their opinions. Moreover, they strengthen their leadership skills and challenge gender stereotypes. According to data from the United Nations, there are still 178 countries in the world that refuse to give women a proper position in society. ^[29] Most developing countries ignore women's contribution due to conservative cultural and religious issues. Therefore, the international community must work together to tackle the problem. Every step we take towards helping women in the world matters, from establishing new girls' schools to increasing the number of women's toilets around rural areas.

Moreover, this essay introduced the shift between Women in Development (WID) and Gender and Development (GAD). Since the WID approach was criticized for its narrow focus on women's issues, GAD was introduced. Compared to the former, the GAD approach emphasizes the need to address gender issues at all levels of society, from the household to the national level. Under the joint efforts of international organizations, NGOs, and local governments, women's status has been rectified, recognizing that women are not a homogenous group. More and more policymakers are willing to listen and consider women's interests in development policies. By encour-

aging women's participation in government affairs and providing platforms for them to express their opinions, more inclusive and effective policies can be carried out.

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