Analysing Gender Roles in Community Natural Resource Management

Negotiation, Lifecourses and Social Inclusion

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1 Introduction

There is a need to facilitate thinking about gender relations without necessarily making men secondary or peripheral to the analysis. Some recent work on gender and development explores relations between men and women in depth and offers a useful reconsideration of some of the underlying concepts and the tools of gender analysis (see for example Jackson and Pearson 1998). However, such sophisticated Gender and Development (GAD) analyses are rarely translated into policy. A review of policy on community-based water resource management highlights the need for more complex approaches to gender. In this article I will suggest that an improved understanding of local decision making in rural livelihoods involves recognising negotiated relations between men and women, changing gender positions over lifecourses and the complexity of individuals' identities. I illustrate here why a more explicit focus on men, as well as women, may be justified.

1.1 Gender and natural resource management

The effective management of water resources is strongly associated in development policy and projects with the greater involvement of women (Van Wijk-Sibesma 1998). However, my research on the collective management of water in Zimbabwe suggested that a broader perspective is required, which deals with gendered relationships more generally and particularly the social context of private and public decision making. The institutions of natural resource management were clearly the site of complex gendered dynamics that did not simply reflect men's dominance and women's subordination. Indeed, in my study areas 'women's' water use priorities seemed to take precedence over 'men's'. Women and men negotiated control of household resources and collective resources, whilst young men seemed to be actively seeking roles which gave them some sort of social presence (see Cleaver 1998 and 2000 for a more detailed discussion of these points).

A focus on women in development, on enumerating women's labour burden, women's inequitable access to resources and their absence from public life has been useful in making women's activities visible, in highlighting issues of gender inequality.

However, an oversimplified focus on women's issues may result in policies that miss the realities of complex gender relations. This is clearly the case in terms of policy towards community-based water resource management.

1.2 Translating gender analysis into policy: gaps and over-simplifications

A review of water policy documents suggests that *gender* concerns in water resource management are primarily defined in terms of *women's* needs and problems. Over the past decade policies have emphasised the need to promote the role of women as the primary managers of water for reasons of project efficiency and women's empowerment. A concern with the burden of women's water management has led to assertions of women's role as the 'natural' managers of water and claims that they should be the 'primary actors' in terms of water resource management (Bulajic 1998). The danger of such assertions when translated into policy is that they 'naturalise' and reinforce inequitable sexual divisions of labour, so increasing women's workloads.

Such policies contain normative generalisations about the qualities of men and women. Women are considered *superior* to men in water resource management, being more knowledgeable (because of their 'natural' role as water carriers), more reliable as managers (as they use the water source daily) and more trustworthy in managing funds (less likely to spend the funds on beer!). Men are rarely explicitly mentioned in such policies and, when they are, it is mainly in terms of their assumed socio-economic dominance and their need to change to allow women a greater role. For example, in water projects, men are frequently exhorted to take on a greater proportion of household tasks in order to free women to sit on water management committees (Cleaver and Kaare 1998).

1.3 The gendered costs and benefits of participation

Several more recent theoretical and policy approaches stress the need for complex and dynamic analyses of gendered interactions in water resource management (Sida 1997; OECD 1995; Agriculture and Human Values 1998). In practice, though, gender analysis in water is commonly operationalised through over-simplified 'toolkits'

which commonly emphasise the desirability of increased women's involvement in the institutions of public life. Participatory approaches in rural development more generally, whilst admitting gender as a concern, maintain simplified (even caricatured) conceptualisations of men and women. Public participation is considered a benefit to all, undeniably a 'good thing'. This is the case despite growing suggestions that there are considerable (gendered) costs as well as benefits (Mayoux 1995) and that women in particular may be better able to meet their needs through non-participation, cheating and stealing (Zwarteveen and Neupane 1996).

Women are envisaged as materially poor and excluded from decision making structures but nevertheless potentially rich in local knowledge, ability and the capacity to be 'empowered' by their involvement in development interventions (Narayan 1995). Despite the focus on women in participatory approaches, little attention is paid to the domestic domain, the focus largely being on public forms of participation. This reflects the bias of economism in mainstream development thinking more generally, which results in a lack of analysis of household dynamics and of the links between the domestic and wider public spheres (Elson 1998).

Participatory approaches are both vague and ambivalent on men's involvement. Men rarely appear explicitly in such policies except as obstacles to women's involvement, or (inconsistently) as local leaders whose participation is desirable as their patriarchal resources of 'authority' can be employed to mobilise and regulate other men and women. Men, then, are vaguely (and ambiguously) conceived of variously as constraints to *and* instruments of development.

Development policies, whilst claiming to be gendered, are often deficient in their oversimplified application of GAD analyses. Focusing on 'natural' gender roles, on public participation and on oppositional ideas about men's and women's interests does little to illuminate the complexities of gender dynamics in rural livelihoods. In particular, policies may reinforce sexual divisions of labour, overlook the role of differing incentives and ongoing household negotiations in people's livelihood decisions and perpetuate divisive generalisations about men and women.

2 Analysing Rural Livelihoods

Much literature on gender in rural livelihoods emphasises the importance of command over assets at the household level and the ways in which women may be particularly disadvantaged in this respect, a disadvantage built into structural systems of inequality. The concept of patriarchy (the socially sanctioned sexual division of labour which systematically privileges men) is used to explain men's assumed predominance in decision making about productive resources, about control and ownership of land, the sale of produce and the use of the proceeds.

The simplicity of this view of male domination/female oppression is thrown into question by recent writings on masculinities, which suggest that dominance and power are linked to the existence of a 'hegemonic masculinity' in which men experience social pressure to conform to dominant ways of 'being a man'. Men who do not conform to this version of masculinity may be disadvantaged and discriminated against (Cornwall 1997; Connell 1995).

Similarly, the large recent literature on household bargaining recognises gendered processes of negotiation in the household and both conflict and cooperation in the allocation of household resources (Moore 1994; Sen 1990). These include the notion that such 'bargaining' takes place within mutually binding constraints, that 'gender orders' or 'gender contracts' at the societal level establish expectations about what men do and what women do. Economic systems, family and conjugal practices, ideologies and 'culture' shape such gender contracts (Kandiyoti 1998; Duncan and Edwards 1999; MacInnes 1998). However, bargaining models also raise the possibility of renegotiation of these gender contracts. Kandiyoti has pointed out that such ideas involve problematic assumptions about individual agency and refers to 'the difficulty of conceptualising gendered identities and subjectivities in a manner that avoids both essentialism and the unproblematic assumption of the self-determining individual' (Kandiyoti 1998:40). Gendered bargaining models may assume both relations of domination/subordination *and* the possibility of negotiating or resisting these. The complexities of such processes are (e.g. Staudt (ed.) 1991) little reflected in policy.

Let us consider some of these ideas further in this example. An elderly married couple from Nkayi district in western Zimbabwe have different perceptions of control over land and crops:

> Gogo [grandmother] says she came to this area to get married but she is the one who built all the huts since her husband used to be out on work. She also cleared and fenced all three fields by herself. That is why she says the fields are 'hers'... As time went on and her children were growing, she gave her second-born one of the fields since he was getting married. This left her with two, one close to home, the other one in the forest. Later on she decided to give her husband half of one of 'her' fields, since he wanted to sell all the produce in the fields, whereas she wanted to keep some for the family. She spends her money the way she likes since her husband doesn't give her anything. After all, they plough together but he doesn't give her anything. Asked how she got this independence, she says she forced her way ... She gets about 50 bags of maize from her fields in addition to what she keeps for consumption. She always keeps some extra than one year's supply but now she is beginning to sell last year's extras because this year it looks promising. (Notes of an interview with Gogo N 8/3/94, translated by Anele Nyoni)

Her husband's view of the situation had a different emphasis:

> Mr N says he owns two fields in which he grows maize, sunflower, groundnuts, sorghum, pumpkins, roundnuts, beans, rapoko and millet, sometimes sweet potatoes. All these crops are grown for consumption. They only sell when they desperately need some cash and then they sell crops like maize and sunflower only. They sell these to the GMB (Grain Marketing Board). Before the GMB came around they would sell locally, to neighbours and to people who needed that particular crop. Asked to whom the fields belong, he said they belong to the two of them, but the wife insists of saying the fields are hers since she did all the clearing and fencing. He only says the fields belong to him to a visitor (stranger) but at home that they belong to the two of them ... He said

that in Ndebele tradition it is well known that everything belongs to the man, but from his point of view he says the fields belong to the two of them – even if the wife says they are hers, he will just admit, just to please her. But when it comes to selling, they will sit down and talk whether it's livestock or crops'. (Notes of an interview with Mr N 9/3/94 translated by Anele Nyoni)

We see here a number of interesting issues pertinent to our discussion; the cultural construction of 'proper' gender roles, the negotiated nature of these and their interaction with wider economic factors over lifecycles. These will be explored further below.

2.1 Conscious and unconscious identities: agency and negotiation.

Whilst a cultural construction of 'proper' gender roles is recognised by the husband in the above case, it is also partial, something appropriate to certain circumstances. Undoubtedly such identities are subject to both conscious and unconscious construction (Giddens 1984); the individual is neither totally subject to a prescribed social role, nor free to be a completely asocial rational individual. Negotiated gender positions are liable to change, but so too are the 'rules' of the frameworks within which such negotiations take place. In the case above, two sets of 'rules' or norms that set the frame for gendered negotiations are apparent. The recognition of a difference between the public presentation of gender roles and the private practice is important, as development policy tends to focus on very public participation, often ignoring the dynamics of private relationships (Mosse 1994).

Very clear in the interview extracts is the role of agency in negotiating gendered control over fields and their produce. In this case, the wife seems to have partly won the right to control over the fields through the periodic absence of her husband (he had been a bus driver) giving her both the opportunity and, in her eyes, the right to assume this. In other cases gendered roles and responsibilities were variable. However, common to my interviews was the idea that women consulted their husbands about major decisions relating to expenditure (such as sale of livestock, enrolling children in school, or building latrines) out of respect and politeness, the

socially and culturally ' right way of doing things'. If husbands disagreed with the proposed action, many women went ahead anyway with various degrees of covertness. One example suffices to illustrate this. An extract from my field diary for 6 March 1994 reads:

Mrs P.N. has been telling me how her (absent, working) husband won't give her the money to build a latrine, so she has just sold a bag of their maize to buy cement herself and is building bit by bit ... Her friend Mrs G reports how her husband, a carpenter, says there is not enough money to register the kids at school this year. So she has been picking and selling wild vegetables and has got together the money herself.

So what, then, is the nature of men's authority in the domestic sphere and do concepts of patriarchy and hegemonic masculinity really help here? If women consult men but then ignore their views, does this represent female empowerment at the expense of male 'authority'? Does the covertness of their resistance represent the strength of oppressive patriarchal norms, or does the resistance itself point out the scope for agency in negotiating these? What are the limits on negotiation of domestic roles, what circumstances do people use to push these limits, what bargaining positions do they adopt and how do these interact with structural factors and with (changing) 'culture'?

The policy implications in terms of gendered approaches to collective resource management are significant. Many policy statements encourage more women's participation in committees, make women responsible for payments and management, encourage women to take on new roles. However, policies need to be more sensitive to the impact of interventions on household level negotiations, and how they reinforce or challenge gendered societal contracts. This necessitates linking instrumental project and sectoral concerns with broader considerations of social dynamics and hierarchies.

2.2 Lifecycles, production and reproduction

Implied by the above interviews and reinforced by further data collection is the importance of change over lifecourses. People's gendered positions and priorities are not fixed but change with age and circumstance. Critical changes may involve

reproduction and marital status. For example, women with very young children are often less able to participate, those with older children may be able to delegate work to them. Such factors may interact with the variable opportunities and constraints offered by productive work, as examples below illustrate.

An examination of the impacts of male labour migration on household decision making brings into question simplified models of male control of resources. In my research, women whose husbands were labour migrants perceived this situation in a variety of ways. Some saw themselves as benefiting from the relative freedom of action offered by an absent husband and regular remittances, others as burdened by having to assume the role of sole agricultural producer. Notably, many women were also still living closely with the husband's family, again a situation they perceived variously as opportunity and constraint. Women who found themselves part of polygynous families could use the situation to advantage (Mrs N had partly won her control of the fields through the labour power of her husband's three younger wives). Other women viewed polygynous arrangements as threatening to their well-being; during the 1992 drought in Zimbabwe many rural women reported that urban-based husbands had ceased sending home remittances, in favour of feeding their urban families.

Men also saw themselves as advantaged and disadvantaged by labour migration. Men working in towns frequently established second families there: a social opportunity that they also perceived as a constraint due to the additional responsibility and financial obligations. Their lengthy absences from rural homes resulted in considerable limitations on their influence over domestic and community decision making. The outcome of formal and informal decision-making processes at village level was heavily influenced by women's priorities and women constituted the majority of adult, economically active people in my study area (Cleaver 1998). Moreover, rural resident men living as part of their own extended polygynous families of various generations were constantly involved in troublesome conflicts over control of resources (usually cattle and land) with their male kin. Indeed, this was one of the main causes of resettlement of men away from their natal village.

The effect of wider structural factors on individual positions and gender roles is notable here. Under the impact of economic reforms in the 1990s many men in Zimbabwe were being made redundant from town jobs and returning to their rural homes. Here they found that women, spurred on by the opening up of a commercial market in grain had begun to produce field crops not just for subsistence (their 'traditional' role) but for sale. This involved women in taking on 'men's tasks' such as breaking and ploughing new fields. Returning men, seeing the opportunity for cash income, were entering into a process of negotiation with women regarding such enterprises. In the absence of other work and facing the de facto control which women had obtained over the fields, men were taking on 'female tasks' like weeding, as this local man makes clear:

> Now I am growing sunflower and maize because you can get high prices for them. We didn't grow sunflower in the past. Men are now more interested in cropping because you can get money for it. In the past you wouldn't find men weeding but now they do. Women like the help men give them in growing crops but they think we are only interested in the money. (Mr W.N. 9/3/94)

So it appears that neither gendered roles nor gendered domination are fixed but are shaped both by individual and domestic circumstances and by wider societal contracts. We also see some support for MacInnes's claim that capitalism and modernity more generally may undermine gender inequalities (MacInnes 1998).

Critically, gendered power relations are embedded in social and economic structures and are therefore not necessarily amenable to change through simple single interventions, as assumed in much development policy. Recently studies of the effects of development interventions on the empowerment of women (often through paid work or income generating opportunities) have raised complex issues about contradictory processes of empowerment and disempowerment, and how to analyse the power constituted in networks of social relationships (Afshar (ed.) 1998; Rowlands 1997).

Increasingly analysts suggest that changes in the economy, social structures and household

composition are resulting in 'crises of masculinity' in many parts of the world. Evidence for this includes the low attainment of boys in education, economic changes resulting in the loss of men's assured role as breadwinner and provider to the family, women's increased incorporation into the labour force, the increase in proportion of female-headed households and the incidence of anti-social behaviour and violence perpetuated by men. The crisis is seen to be caused not just by structural and social changes, but by the attitudes and beliefs associated with dominant masculinities. Several recent studies detail exploratory approaches to working towards gender equity in development. They emphasise the need to become involved in personal social issues as well as structural ones, to facilitate a reconsideration of men's roles as providers and women's roles as carers in families and to promote gender equitable changes in these roles (Thompson 1998; Engle 1997). A focus on the links between gendered economic positions and roles in families, however, overlooks some of the issues of the dynamics of social inclusion and exclusion in the community, a subject to which I now turn.

2.3 Gender roles and social capital, inclusion and exclusion.

A concern with social exclusion and the role of social capital in overcoming poverty is key to current development thinking (de Haan and Maxwell 1998). Ideas about social exclusion have linked concepts of individual participation with community, participation and association with political and economic benefits. The concept of social inclusion emphasises involvement in the structures and institutions of society 'through which a shared sense of the public good is created and debated' (IILS/UNDP 1997).

Given the centrality of social capital to rural livelihoods (Narayan 1997) it is curious that the debate about social capital and social exclusion is little gendered (for an exception see Jackson 1999). The focus is largely on 'formal' manifestations of association, rather than 'informal' social networks and family structures. Elsewhere I have illustrated the variable positions of poor women in relation to social inclusion by showing how some may draw on kinship networks, others construct new associational activities in securing livelihood strategies (Cleaver 2000).

However, whilst considerable attention is paid to the need for increased involvement of women, and efforts focus on establishing women's groups and supporting women's networks, similar attention is not paid to the social inclusion of men. Despite fashionable ideas about the crisis of masculinity, young men's perceptions of the need for respect, for social involvement, is not well analysed in the gender and development literature, and little reflected in development policy.

Further questions are raised by an examination of the role and perceptions of the young men who became 'grazing policemen' in my study village. These six young men were charged by the community with the role of maintaining the grazing rules, keeping cattle out of prohibited areas to preserve the grass supplies there and 'arresting' offending cattle so that their owners could be fined. The willingness of these (mostly cattle-less) young men to put considerable time into preserving grazing grass for benefit of cattle owners can be explained by their dependence on the draught power of others for ploughing. Weberian concepts of patriarchy (as the rule of the father) can also explain the control which older men exercise over younger ones (MacInnes 1998; Duncan 1994). But these generalised explanations do not suffice. They fail to explain, for example, how young men are put in a community sanctioned position of being able to 'arrest' and cause to be fined the cattle of their own senior male kin and neighbours. They also fail to explain the time devoted to this voluntary activity and the complexity of individual motivations to participate. In this account a young man sees the value of the grazing policeman's role not simply in terms of the management of cattle but in broader personal and social terms:

> I became a policeman because that is what I wanted to be. To be a successful policeman you must catch offenders because then people will say ' that is a good policeman' and then they will confide in you and bring problems to you. I am very strict about devoting time to policing, even in the rainy season when there is plenty to do in the fields, because that is the only way to be a good policeman ... (D.M. 28/8/92)

This concern for 'respect' and for social inclusion is echoed in other accounts of young men's

involvement in community activities (see, for example, Jobes 1998). Important here are the networks created by such involvement, the inclusion in wider social relationships facilitated by participation in cattle policing. An understanding of how social capital is formed should not simply and instrumentally be about furthering economic activity, 'building community' and ensuring the effective management of communal resources. It should also enable us to further analyse processes of gendered engagement and inclusion, and the meanings attached by individuals to such processes.

3 Conclusions and Policy Implications

I have argued that we have several problems with gender approaches to development. These relate not just to the omission of men in favour of women but to the conceptualisation of men and women, of their capacities as individual agents and the varying constraints effective upon them. I have raised some questions about gender approaches to development, which have implications for policy.

In applying gender analysis frameworks, care should be taken to consider the position of men as well as women, and to recognise that there are significant differences between *and amongst* particular men and particular women. Rather than assigning

people to generalised categories of 'men' and 'women', consideration should be given to the age, social status and place in lifecourse. These factors will critically affect people's interests and capacities in terms of natural resource management.

When analysing gendered resource use and management, care should be taken to avoid essentialist assumptions about men's roles and women's roles. Whilst culturally defined gender roles in natural resource management do exist, they may be more flexible than at first appears and subject to negotiation and change. It would be useful in formulating policy to find out more about the scope for such flexibility, the circumstances in which it occurs.

A wider social analysis is required for the understanding of gendered collective resource management. In particular the links between (gendered) social networks, public participation and economic activity are critical to understanding the dynamics of rural livelihoods. Recognition of the importance of both wider structural factors and individual agency in shaping gendered livelihood practices is important. This involves broadening the focus away from instrumental project-focused approaches towards recognising the complexities of people's motivations, including the need for self-esteem and self-respect and their own construction of 'proper' gender roles.

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