

# Which Men, Why Now?

## *Reflections on Men and Development*

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As the analysis, policy formulation and practice around what can loosely be called 'women and development' enters its fourth decade, it is instructive to reflect on its history for insights into the current enthusiasm for placing men and masculinities equally centrally in discussions of gender and development. In many ways the arguments marshalled are parallel and complementary: men as well as women are gendered and thus gender-blind development affects men too. Men, like women, have been constrained by stereotypical gender roles which in many cases undervalue their real contributions and potentials and fail to reflect dynamic and changing aspects of contemporary society. Efforts to achieve gender equity and to reverse women's subordination are frustrated by the absence of men in the analysis and in policy formulation and implementation, for if men are part of the problem they surely must be part of the solution. There are a whole range of thoughtful interventions which expound these and other arguments aimed at persuading principally the gender (women) and development community and the development community at large that men's time has come (White 1997; Sweetman 1997; Cornwall 1997).

But is the men position really the parallel of the forces that propelled women's issues into the development stage in the 1970s? As I have argued elsewhere (Pearson and Jackson 1998) the impetus behind women and development in the framework of development institutions and development policy from the 1970s was the second wave feminist movement in all its utopian confidence of the post World War II years of growth and reconstruction. The 'baby boom' generation, fuelled by participation in anti-colonialist and civil rights struggles, embraced feminism as a movement which both promised liberation for women as well as men and provided the basis of an international solidarity based on common gender oppression. In spite of the many divisions and shortcomings in both feminism and the Women in Development (WID) movement, there is no denying the political optimism and transformatory agenda of its proponents and its agents.

But where is that political impetus behind the current clamour for a greater involvement of men in Gender and Development (GAD)? Is the enthusiasm

for men borne more out of a politically impotent 'postist' politics, which is based on deconstructing universalist social identities and has used post-modernist analysis to celebrate difference rather than seek commonalities? Does the 'men in development' movement also carry a transformatory vision of equitable relations between men and women and a liberation agenda in terms of freeing men from the burdens and frustrations of outmoded gender performances and scripts?

To raise questions about the political basis and vision of men in development, we also need to ask: who are its participants? Is the 'men in development' movement led by men seeking to transform development policy and practice by implementing an anti-sexist and inclusionary agenda? Is it led by activists seeking to confront the problems and frustrations of inequitable gender relations? Is it being driven by theorists who accept, or reject, a 'personal is political' position, or even by those who assert that the political is not just the personal? To what extent is it driven by men or by women? By feminists or technical gender specialists? And do its proponents share the vision of gender solidarity and internationalist fraternity which inspired the WID movement of the 1970s onwards?

The purpose of this article is to interrogate the 'men and development' project, in order to understand the diverse motivations and positions it encompasses; to compare this with the politics of the 'women and development' project; and to explore the significance of these differences in terms of the politics of men and development. In addressing this issue I pose a number of connected but distinct questions. The first concerns the political and institutional location in which advocates for a greater focus on men and masculinity are emerging at the present time. The second is about which men are actively involved at different levels in promoting the GAD agenda, and the extent to which this agenda is aimed solely at including men, or whether it problematises accepted identities of men and masculinities and is aimed at promoting change in both the identities and the policy assumptions that flow from them. A third is to interrogate which men in development are being included in the 'men and gender' project, which groups of men in which contexts are the targets rather than the subjects of this endeavour? And fourth I speculate on why, at the beginning of

this new millennium, the masculine agenda is penetrating the GAD agenda.

## **1 Men in Development: Whose Agenda?**

One clear difference is the location of the men in development vocalists. In the 1970s the WID movement was instigated by feminist women, inspired by Boserup's pathbreaking classic. WID was named and empowered by the USAID Percy amendment. As many have pointed out, most of these people were by definition Northern and almost exclusively of white and dominant ethnicity. Their politics was, in the main, that of 'liberal feminism', in line with the dominant political framework of the day. The important point is that they were women within powerful development organisations who were linking their personal politics (feminism) to their professional locations as development institution bureaucrats, and using this privileged position to argue for resources, opportunities and visibility for women in development. In other words they were mobilising their political and professional subjectivity on behalf of women recipients and participants in development cooperation programmes. They were motivated both by professional interest – in making development assistance more appropriate – and solidarity with the gender subordination of women in development recipient countries. Their politics both reflected their particular gender identity (as Northern, mainly white privileged women professionals) and attempted to transcend it by acting with and on behalf of women internationally.

The timeliness of this political/professional moment was reflected in the enthusiasm with which women in many developing countries embraced these initiatives and worked with and in parallel to these Northern inspired initiatives. Although it has often been charged that feminism is a Western political movement, inspired by what Betty Friedman termed the 'problem that has no name' – i.e. the middle class educated woman's frustration with re-confinement to the domestic – such dissatisfaction was echoed by feminists from all around the world. Those present at the IDS's conference on 'The Continuing Subordination of Women' in 1978 will bear witness not only to the breadth and sophistication of many of the papers presented by third

world analysis, but the connections made between the personal and political by women from the geopolitical South as well as the North.<sup>1</sup> This event, and many subsequent academic activist and international gatherings, continuously re-validated the feminist vision of the 'women in development' project and accompanied it through its tortuous path from WID to GAD and from targeting to mainstreaming (Razavi and Miller 1995).

I recall this not to indulge in empty nostalgia but to extract a sharp political lesson from this his/hers-story: that WID was as much a political as a technical developmentalist project and those involved in it engaged their political subjectivity as well as their professional and analytical skills. It is no coincidence, for example, that the early Northern-based gender analysts were, in my experience, politically engaged with the women's movement in their non-professional or academic lives – involved in women's shelters, rape crisis centres, women's health initiatives, and anti-imperialist and anti-racist politics. The later years, when the success of 'gender' had made women's perspectives in development programmes and policies more acceptable and mainstream, coincided with the demise of women's activism in the UK and other Northern countries, and the expansion of professional opportunities for women within this field. This inevitably resulted in a certain de-politicisation of the gender and development field, though at the same time it provided a basis for the sophistication of the WID position, and a refinement of positions now understood as the transition from WID to GAD (Pearson, 2000). But the 'men and development' project seems to be quite different in a number of ways.

First let us examine who are its protagonists? As this and other volumes demonstrate, the majority of those who have engaged their time and energy in this project are women rather than men. There are many men outside 'development' who have contributed to the growing number of scholarly and political volumes on men and masculinity, as well as the plethora of journalistic essays questioning, berating, problematising, acknowledging and denying the crisis in masculinity of contemporary society. But where does the politics of internationalism and solidarity connect with the reality of male disquiet and unease? And where is their point of intersection with development analysis and practice?

The answer would appear to be – nowhere much. In spite of the increased volume of writings on men and development, the involvement of actual male persons from the development business is fairly restricted. A survey carried out by Chant and Gutmann (1999) reported that in spite of a general stated desire that work should begin around issues like fathering, there was 'remarkably little of direct relevance to men and development, [which] reveals the minimal work with men that has actually been conducted' (1999:57). This is interesting, particularly in view of the identification of specific areas of work in which there appears to be a consensus that men have to be involved in development activity, as part of the solution as well as part of the problem. To date this consensus applies only in limited areas of GAD work, specifically those concerned with reproductive health and family planning, and male violence against women, (*more than physical*) domestic violence and sexual violence in society in general, as well as within the family. It has yet to be extended for instance to intra-household budgeting, labour market distortions, education and training, or property rights and legal status for men and women.

## 2 Which Men?

Having identified the absence of men in positions of power and influence in development organisations and research which are championing the extension of gender and development to men, it is important to identify which men are actually participating in the 'men and development' project. There is a general view (supported by Chant and Guttman 1999) that it is men in the South who, with a particularly enlightened view of men and masculinity, are prepared publicly and professionally to challenge dominant and destructive masculinities in their communities, and work towards changing attitudes and behaviour in daily life. For example the *Salud y Genero* ('health and gender') group which was established in 1992 in Mexico by health workers, has extended its work from women to men, initially in order to expedite the success of programmes aimed at improving women's health and reducing vulnerability to domestic violence. In this case it was a professional engagement with men which has been transformed to a more radical political position prepared to challenge 'certain hegemonic traits of masculinity [that] also carry a heavy cost on the

lives of the men themselves, in terms of their fathering, for example, to say nothing of the costs to the women in their lives' (interview with member of *Salud y Genero*, cited in Chant and Gutmann (1999:63).

Many other groups have been concerned with the issue of male violence against women. In a number of countries in Southern Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, and East Asia there has been a growing focus on not just working with violent men, but also working with men to challenge the particular dominant masculinity that constructs men as violent. The Nicaraguan *Puntos de Encuentro* group for example works with groups of men to understand the potential for violence in a society in which women in recent years have assumed a significant independent and assertive role. This group has initiated a campaign around violence, which is targeted at men in the context of 'disaster'. Interestingly this is a feminist organisation in which men have worked for some time and more generally in Nicaragua there have been interesting discussions about the possibilities, potentials and problems of feminist organisations working with, for and on men. Although many of the interviewees for the Chant and Guttman project stressed the need to work with men in order to improve the health and security of both men and women, most also stressed the dangers as well as the benefits.

But what is indisputable is that, in spite of the successful mainstreaming of gender issues in development organisations and policies (claimed if not achieved in a range of contexts from the UN to OXFAM international) gender in development still remains not only focused on women, but ignored by the majority of men who occupy positions of power and influence in institutions. Certainly the gender Consultative Committee which was one of the outcomes of the Women's Eyes on the (World) Bank project has not been either populated or even propositioned by individuals or senior groups of male executives from key policy domains of the World Bank. The successes at DFID in mainstreaming gender issues within the Social Development Division has yet to be matched by an internally generated groundswell of senior civil servants demanding that men and masculinity in development be problematised. Those at the pinnacle of power in development organisations, whilst often accepting

more than superficially that gender matters in development, have not translated this insight into a politically orchestrated demand to challenge dominant male roles in communities in which development cooperation is active, nor to highlight the connections between men's position in the policy formulation and implementation processes in such organisations and the male bias inherent in their positions and concerns.

However, there are men in some development agencies who are rising to this challenge. So far they tend to be middle level, mid-career professionals in the international NGOs and the bilateral development agencies of Scandinavian countries, who are striving to connect political questioning of the role of men and masculinities within their own countries with their work as development professionals. For example, the Norwegian government has highlighted the need to mobilise the experience and political will of men as well as women (see Chant and Gutmann 1999:18). Two men employed by Swedish development agencies with a specific responsibility for promotion of gender equality have recently completed a study supported by their employers.<sup>2</sup> This study examines attitudes amongst Sida's (male and female) staff towards male participation in the promotion of gender equality in development, starting from the position that male participation is much needed within GAD, reiterating Alversson and Due Billing's insistence that 'an interest in gender relations includes taking men more seriously, not just as beneficiaries of patriarchy but also as a broad and divergent category whose members also experience mixed feelings, thoughts and orientations' (1997:54). The authors take their mandate from the reconceptualisation of development cooperation policy by Sida in 1997, which stressed the importance of more attention being given to men and male involvement in gender.

Interestingly, this research reports that there are less than a handful of men working on gender issues in Sida, with none having explicit responsibility for working on and/or with men. Whilst interviewees agreed that gender equality is important and is not necessarily the preserve of women, there was a lack of consensus about the extent to which this objective is supported by institutional policy, or by men and women within the organisation. What emerges from their study is a large gap between the rhetoric

of the organisation's policy statements on gender and the reality which demonstrates that men do not perceive any political dangers of taking more responsibility for gender issues, but that institutional pressures pre-empt their doing this.

Färnsveden and Rönquist's study may well represent a vanguard in terms of a reassessment within development agencies of how policies on gender equality should be forwarded. However, it says very little about what policies engaging with men and masculinities in development might consist of. Instead, it implies unproblematically that more male involvement with gender equality and development policies will meet the growing demand to apply gender analysis to men as well as women. Whilst it might have seemed logical, if naïve, in the early days of WAD that the incorporation of more women into the professional staff of development agencies would lead to policies and practices more sensitive to the priorities of women as a subordinated gender, increasing the role of men in GAD work may have a number of outcomes, including the weakening of the commitment to gender equity, the negation of women's perspectives, or the incorporation of men's articulated interests rather than the interrogation and deconstruction of men's superordinated gender power.

### 3 Why Now?

If few men have yet to 'own' a 'men and development' gender, it is nevertheless significant that some – and a growing number – are doing so, accompanied by a range of women motivated by any number of political positions. However it is also pertinent to ask why at this moment, as we enter the 21st century, the issue of men is being placed on the gender and development agenda by a diverse range of stakeholders. These stakeholders include not just radical NGOs such as OXFAM or Save the Children, but bilaterals such as SIDA and increasingly multilaterals, including the World Bank, which commissioned the Chant and Guttman study cited above. It is too early to say what the objective(s) of mainstream development institutions might be in incorporating men into their gender agenda, but there are a number of possible and co-existing possibilities. These include: the diluting of a radical women-focused agenda; the necessity to stabilise marginal male populations dislocated by

recent changes in social and economic systems; the need to work with rather than against conservative political forces such as the Taliban in Afghanistan, whose intransigence to women's autonomy threatens gender mainstreaming and equity policies; and as a response to the claims that men have been excluded from gender and development policies and resources. Whilst no institution has a hegemonic and unitary gender policy, it will be interesting to track the ways in which 'men and development' are incorporated within development institutions hierarchies and power structures.

In terms of the geopolitical moment within development, a prime impetus for the re-focusing of gender analysis on the roles, identity needs and interests of men may well lie in the crisis in global reproduction, as I have discussed elsewhere (Pearson, forthcoming). There are several gender implications of economic and social changes implied by contemporary globalisation, which encourage increased attention to male roles and identities in production and reproductive activities. These include the rapid incorporation of women into the labour and commodity markets, the abandoning of any unreal assumptions that men's wages could support a family and household without women's contribution, the recognition of the fact that war, inter-ethnic and community-level violence is a major obstacle to and challenge for development policy and the growing demands for macro policy initiatives to meet the subsistence needs of an ageing population. These factors have encouraged a (re) examination of the contributions of men to conflict and violence on the one hand and to non-monetary reproductive activity in the household and the community on the other. The politics of interest emerging from the interest-based discourses in the West on men and masculinity are meeting the needs-based discourse of excluded groups on poverty and social crisis in the global South.

The question of why women are supporting (or indeed resisting) the re-focusing of GAD on men is rehearsed extensively elsewhere (see White 1997 and this issue; Cleaver this issue etc.). My purpose here is to understand the political interests of those (few) men who are moving (in) on this issue in order to help formulate a response which might answer the questions raised at the beginning of this article – the extent to which current initiatives on

men and development can be expected to contribute to (or help towards contributing to) an emancipatory vision of transforming gender relations.

Clearly the motivation for different groups of men will imply different outcomes for a transformatory gender agenda. Southern men, working with other men and women to challenge the ways in which local masculinities prevent progress towards gender equity and provide obstacles to empowering women, are coming out of very specific contexts and quite different ones from those of Northern men in development institutions, seeking to meet the equal opportunities and gendering development agendas of their own organisations.

The political bases of these two groups are different and contradictory. The men involved in the Southern-based initiatives are, to the extent that I am aware of, mainly in countries that have experienced disaster, conflict or displacement, in which the ongoing possibilities for change are challenged by social identities that threaten the development possibilities of marginalised communities and their members: such threats are made by 'men behaving badly', in families, in neighbourhoods, in governments, in the armed forces – in all the social and political structures that govern daily life. These Southern men are of a generation for which the political struggle for democracy and justice is part of their history and heritage. In choosing to work on gender issues by challenging men and masculinities they are translating their experience and their political agendas from the structural to the subjective, in the sense of pursuing individual men's agency as well as structural dynamics of social and other exclusions.

The Northern men are operating in a different context. They are inspired by a politics of masculinity in Scandinavia, which has received public support and validation by the state in terms of generous paid paternity leave, family-friendly policies which encourage flexible and part-time employment and public policy initiatives encouraging involved and sensitive male parenting and role models. However, interestingly, the interest politics of challenging male roles in Swedish society, for instance, is translated into an enquiry about equal opportunities for men and women to work on gender within

development organisations, linked to equal opportunities for gender people to work on men as well as women. The Swedish men in question are the *subjects of their own gender interests*; the men and masculinities on which the organisation's gender programmes and staff should work reflect the *needs based analysis of men who are the objects* of gender and development programmes. Whilst this, of course, reflects the professional and structural position of men in Northern development agencies, it also demonstrates the political safeness of what is being proposed – that men within development organisations should participate and shape gender and development programmes for men who are the objects of development assistance – with as yet no substantive discussion of what such initiatives or male-centred programmes might comprise. What is missing from this analysis and this positioning is any linkages being made between the men in the development organisations and those men for whose benefit masculinising gender and development programmes are being proposed.<sup>3</sup>

This brings me to the point of this article. If, as I have argued, the impetus for introducing gender into development policy practice and analysis came from an extension, however flawed and limited, of international and political solidarity between women working in development and those for whom development activity was meant to benefit, what is the significance of the absence of this solidarity of interest between those involved in 'men and development' and those on whom it is (to be) practised? Whilst it is clear that there are men within development organisations in some post-trauma countries willing to engage and involve themselves as subjects as well as objects of gender and development activity, this is not a widespread situation for those in the mainstream, either of gender and development activity, or development more generally. As a result perhaps, the increased recognition of gender bias, of gender-based violence in and out of times of conflict, of the ways in which women are reconstituted as the subordinate gender in the household and the workplace, is not being translated into a mainstream and concerned challenging of men's roles and responsibilities. Until this takes place there will be too many people, feminist activists and gender specialists, who will continue to be suspicious of the current masculinist turn in gender and development.

## Notes

1. An out-of-conference session, facilitated by Dr Nawal El Sadaawi, had the 60 participants from 35 countries publicly discuss the point at which they consciously embraced feminism. Although the details of many of the academic papers have faded with time, the immediacy remains intact of hearing about women's strategies to emerge from constraining marriages with progressive men, from concealing their sexuality – even within the relatively progressive women's movements of the day, from kin-bound single motherhood, from received expectations about appropriate marriages and careers, or to forge radical solutions in the face of taboos on women using bicycles, or contraceptives (see *IDS Bulletin* 1979).
2. The study by Färnsveden and Rönquist (1999) was prepared as a joint dissertation for a Masters Degree at the Peace and Development Research Institute at the University of Goteborg. The authors received financial and other support from their employers.
3. The solidarity and political linkages are, of course, made by those advocating the challenging of dominant heterosexual masculinities in development (see Seabrook) though most of this work is coming from outside a 'development cooperation' framework.

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