'The Integration of Women into the Development Process': Some Conceptual Problems*

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One of the opportunities provided by the SOW Workshop leading up to the 1978 Conference was to review past and present strategies for the improvement of women's status in the Third World. This work involved both examining the policy statements of national and international development agencies, and re-evaluating rural development programmes for women implemented on the basis of such strategies. We found it to be an excellent way of uncovering many of the assumptions behind such programmes.

The 1975 United Nations conference on women in Mexico certainly provided the stimulus to research and implementation of rural development programmes involving women, but there were already programmes on the ground. The demand of the conference for the 'integration of women into the development process' did not represent an entirely new idea. I had myself, between 1972 and 1975, been involved in a small rural development project in Nigeria where, among other programmes, we had been trying to help women improve their economic opportunities, to 'integrate' them into the development process. In 1976 I had also evaluated *Animation Féminine* programmes in Niger, which by 1972 had, in certain areas, defined their goals under the general title of the integration of women into development.[1] There seems some value, therefore, in examining the concept of integration as it was understood before 1975 to see how it had developed, and to examine the way in which the concept was applied to, and affected the direction of research and planning. Lack of experience, and especially lack of resources, debilitated *Animation Féminine*, so it cannot be presented as the model for future programmes. But it also confronted difficulties which, I shall argue, were of its own making, and arose from this early concept of integration. At the same time such evaluation exercises by people concerned to understand the effects of rural development programmes on women, or to assess their usefulness as policy instruments, are very important.[2] All too often the evaluation of rural development programmes is merely a bureaucratic exercise, looking only at the efficiency of management or the success of technical innovation. The implications of the very assumptions upon which the programme was based have frequently been neglected.

The demand for the integration of women into the development process was barely a year old before attention was drawn to its dubious implications. We may note two of these here. First it is associated with a goal of social reform described as: "... a sustained improvement in the well-being of the individual and of society and to bestow benefits on all" (UN 1975: item 11, para. 13). The thorough-going worthiness of this goal makes it easy for all parties to concur in it: we are *all* to benefit. Such lofty values conceal the sting in its tail. Anything that is good for me is good for you.

The second feature has been described by Papanek. There is: "... a curious ambiguity in the concept of *integrating* women in the development process (which) hampers the achievement of this goal from the start. For women are full participants in all processes of social change . . ." (Papanek: 1977: 15).

Elliot has suggested that the strategy of integration belongs to the model of development which she calls revised developmentalism and which arose from a critique of modernisation theory (1977: 4). The most significant feature of this critique is that the modernisation process does not lead to an equal distribution of social benefits. This can only be achieved by conscious policies on the part of existing and reformed institutions to correct deviations from the path to sustained development, and invokes the intervention of the state to moderate between the 'parties' in this process. Development is thus a process of planned change, and the model assumes that those sectors of society which have not had changes planned for them (or 'with' them) are not integrated into development.

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1 In 1976 the author acted as consultant to the E.E.C. in the evaluation of their rural development programmes in the Department of Zinder (The 3M Project) and in the Badéguicher Valley, and in the assessment of the *Animation Féminine* Programme in Niger. The Rural Development Programmes were started in 1971/72.

2 For a discussion of the 'failure to learn from failure' in rural development see Heyer et al, 1976.

Women are not considered to be the only category omitted from this process. For example, in her critique of rural development planning in Africa, Uma Lele suggests that large sections of what she refers to as the 'subsistence population' have not been integrated into the process of development. She therefore proposes institutional reform to direct and control investment in this sector and to seek the participation of the rural population in planned change (Lele: 1975: 20).

Much of the language of revised developmentalism is irritatingly bland. It is the language of partnership and participation, terms which barely conceal the fact that the dominant partner is the one who controls the resources and the power to define goals and modify the obstacles to development. Participation is the willingness to go along with these goals. It can still, like modernisation theory, lapse into vulgar psychologism, when failure to participate in the revised framework of development can turn the newly integrated partner in development into the obstacle to his/her own development. Furthermore, as Elliot points out:

> "... much of the developmentalist literature disembodies information and attitudes from economic structures and power relationships. It rests on the assumption that more enlightened planning will remove the obstacles to women's participation" (Elliot: 1977: 5).

The model of revised developmentalism does not necessarily involve a redefinition of development itself, although it has been associated with a critique of the notion that development can be measured in terms as crude as GNP for example, since GNP itself is neither a measure of the distribution of the benefits of development, nor an indicator of those who produce them. The proponents of the strategy have been more concerned to analyse the contribution to the economy of subsistence production or domestic labour, and therefore to legitimate the claims of such sectors to a share of benefits through corrective measures to the instruments of investment and redistribution. However, the model does not in itself include the continuation of development programmes of the same general character as those that preceded demands for integration: increasing productivity, greater integration in the market and so on. Indeed, it *demands* the latter, for the market remains the instrument for redistribution. Consequently, it provides little room for change in many aspects of rural development programmes—even when they are planned to integrate women.

The critique of the modernisation process suggests that men may have benefited from planned change (through access to improved technology, production of cash crops, for example) but have not passed on these benefits to women. The way round this problem adopted by the *Animation Féminine* programme was to look for ways in which women could be given direct access to the same opportunities as men (skills, credit, technical improvements) in situations where their activities were not under the control of men. Such a strategy was reached on the basis of general assumptions about the relationship between women's labour and household production.

I shall examine two problems arising from the *Animation Féminine* programme. The first is the fairly general problem of the kind of research which needs to be undertaken to provide the basic data for the integration of women into development. One of the prior difficulties here is that the structure of rural production in the process of transformation becomes the subject of research. But the analytical tools for describing the sexual division of labour in the process of transformation are notably weak, especially when they are used in the context of a model which implies (even if it does not intend to) that women's role in the economy has not been subjected to the same processes as that of men. The analysis confronts particular difficulties when there is a strong cultural tendency to represent 'the system of allocation of agents to positions within the labour process on the basis of sex' (Young, 1978: 125) as immutable.

The second problem is that in peasant economy in general, a large part of women's labour is appropriated through household production, but rewards are distributed not on the basis of the amount of work done but through social evaluation of age, gender or conjugal rank. Thus, while research may render visible the contribution of female labour to the economy, the institutional framework of production is not immediately susceptible to reforms which would realign the distribution of benefits to the contribution of members. Thus there is a tendency to concentrate on spheres in which women's activities appear relatively independent of domestic control, and therefore directly accessible to planning. However, the existence of independent activities often turns out to be illusory in the sense that their autonomy is relative, dependent upon the particular conditions of demand for domestic labour or for access to productive resources within the household.

A brief comment is necessary on the history of Animation programmes in Niger. The Animation Service started a few years after independence and was initially as much a vehicle through which the party in power sought to obtain political support in both rural and urban sectors as an institutional framework for modernisation policies (Charlick: 1972). However, its expressed goal was to open up the mass of the population to the notion of development. Once opened up, marketing cooperatives and rural development programmes followed.[3] By the late 1960s international development aid was being sought to implement integrated rural development programmes in the areas covered by the Animation Service (more particularly the main cash-crop producing areas). At this time too Animation received financial resources to develop the *Animation Féminine* programme and research into the role of women was undertaken as a preliminary stage to the implementation of action programmes. These were introduced initially in areas already opened up by the (renamed) *Animation Masculine* Programme. By 1973 a *Animation Féminine* programme, under the title of *L'Insertion des Femmes*, was integrated into a rural development programme which had originally had no women's conponent.[4]

The *Animation Féminine* programme was justified from the very beginning as the means by which the benefits of development would be extended to women. The objectives of the programmes were described as follows:

> "... to sensitise the female population to the problems of development in the area already covered by *Animation Masculine* and to enable them to participate in the local developmental activities" (République du Niger 1971: 1, Author's translation).

The programme assumed that women had been excluded from participation in the processes of planned change already initiated by *Animation Masculine* and the cooperative structure. At one level, at least, this appeared to be true. The development programmes were based on the community—a collectivity deemed capable of becoming a modernised framework for collective development, a goal explicitly described in terms of equal sharing in the struggle for and benefits from development. The reason for the choice of the community as the base, and the problem of developing it as the institutional framework for modernisation was fully recognised:

> "The organisation of the population, along with the creation of participant development, constitute the very basis of *Animation*. ... It means establishing a structure capable of continually increasing the participation of the peasantry in the elaboration and execution of different projects and programmes of collective action. ..."
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> "... the cooperative idea has been introduced from outside while being adapted to the realities of Niger. Cooperation, one of the responses to new conditions is a result of political choice. ... Pre-colonial Niger was not cooperative: in the economic field, for example, the conditions for cooperative development barely existed. What existed instead was basically mutual aid and a certain community spirit. As a result, cooperation in Niger depends upon these traditions of mutual aid and community spirit which still survive" (République du Niger 1975(b): 9, Author's translation).

Whatever the difficulties of reconstituting the community, however, as a modernising institution, it is fairly obvious why neither *Animation* nor the co-operative movement could claim that they had involved women in development. Women had neither political status nor political representation in the community. In theory, it was the institution least appropriate for the integration of women into development. Not only was this the case in the 'traditional' community, but the process of modernisation, in so far as it had achieved any recognisable restructuring of community participation and leadership, had reinforced the hegemony of men. There were a number of administrative offices for men only in the *Animation* and cooperative structures, and access to credit and marketing was also confined to males.

Animation Féminine was forced to adopt a concilatory attitude towards male leadership by having to seek the permission of village authorities to approach women. They also accepted that their tactics would have to accommodate male perceptions of the role of women in the community:

> "... given the structure of Nigerien society, and the problem which women daily confront, it was necessary to go through a preliminary phase focusing on the problems of health, hygiene and nutrition before being able to act within the economic sector (production—marketing—processing)" (République du Niger 1975(a): 11, Author's translation).

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[3] For a valuable assessment of the co-operative programmes in the Zinder Department see Collins, 1974.

[4] The programme was instituted under this title in the Rural Development Project in the Department of Zinder. (République du Niger: 1974.)

This is not to argue that the problems of health, hygiene and nutrition were unimportant to women (although *Animation Féminine's* resources for dealing with them were derisory): rather that the integration of women was conditioned by male acceptance of their participation in an institutional structure already controlled by males. Moreover, even the problems of health and hygiene could not be used as the vehicle for women's entry into community affairs. The *Animation Masculine* programme had already created male village sanitary and first aid officers who nominally required some sort of public authority. The participation of women in health problems was thus restricted to 'women's affairs' *par excellence*: child birth and child care.

It is easy enough to argue here that more enlightened planning would result from being integrated from the start in the process of planned change. However, further problems loom. If the political weakness of women is no more than an aberration of traditional culture, and in this particular case, lack of foresight on the part of the Animation Service, then enlightened discussion and institutional reform may well correct the problem. If the political and economic subordination of women, however, is an aspect of their function in the economy at a particular stage of development, then institutional reform can have at best only partial results. *Animation Féminine's* research into the role of women, however, could not have indicated this function.

The main concern of *Animation Féminine* was to help women to earn an additional cash income to finance their personal obligations to provide additional food and clothing for themselves and their children. In this context, integration meant access to the same institutional provision of credit and agricultural inputs as men so as to increase women's productivity. The research does not indicate whether women had experienced a deterioration in their cash income because developmental opportunities had been denied them. However it was pointed out that women were not members of co-operatives, and therefore could not market their production (of groundnuts) direct to co-operatives, but only via their husbands. This deprived them of the (small) co-operative dividends. The researchers thus confronted the problem of locating a way in which women could, independently, acquire improved access to income-generating activity, at the same time as they confronted conceptual difficulties in analysing the sexual division of labour and the role of women in household production.

The rural economy of Hausa Niger has experienced major changes over the last half-century, of which we have as yet a very inadequate account. In outline, what was a self-provisioning economy, which also supplied urban trade centres with foodstuffs and objects of domestic manufacture such as cloth, was transformed after colonial conquest into an economy supplying an increasing quantity of agricultural commodities—mainly groundnuts—to the export market. Virtually no modification in technology was introduced to raise productivity until the mid 1960s. The increase in groundnut production required an extension of the area under cultivation, which by the 1960s, had reached areas marginal to agricultural production or previously devoted to food crop production. Land shortage led ultimately to an intensification of land use with severe ecological consequences (Reynaut: 1975).

The economic unit of production is generally described as the household (*gandu*) but while some research has been done on the effects of such changes upon household size (see Wallace, 1978), we know virtually nothing of the effects of the introduction of a new crop,[5] and the extent of the increased demand for agricultural labour, upon the labour process within the household. In addition, seasonal male migration suggests at the very least that some modification in the sexual division of labour must have occurred.

However, the assumption pervading the research carried out as the basis of the *Animation Féminine* programme was that women's role in production had not experienced change, being governed by a customary and rigid application of sex-typing to tasks. Nor was it anticipated that any tinkering, however minimal, with women's economic opportunities, might provoke any consequences. I will argue that this orientation derived from assumptions both of the nature of the household and of women's participation in development.

The research on the sexual division of labour in the household,[6] set out to describe women's activities in terms of both domestic labour available to the household, and of those conceptualised as in some way independent of the household. The main conclusions were clear. Most of a woman's labour is deployed upon household production which has priority over any other independent activity. Yet the proposal for women's integration into

[5] Groundnuts were being produced in Niger in the mid 19th century. The development of production for the export market began when the railway reached Kano (Nigeria) in 1914. (Collins, 1974.)

[6] Research was carried out among 539 women in 20 villages in Zinder Department. (République du Niger, 1974:2.)

development focused on the sphere of independent activity.

The analysis of the household was presented in the following terms. The household is a unit of production under the direction of a male household head. Household relations of production are a set of formally expressed obligations to provide labour in return for access to the products of labour made possible through the redistributive function of the male household head. The formal rules expressive of these obligations were that junior members of the household—all females and dependent males—contributed five days labour on the household farms. In return for their labour, junior members receive food and some clothing, junior males received their marriage portion and the household head paid taxes on behalf of all adult dependents. The sexual division of labour was described as a series of sex-associated tasks of an unproblematic character: there are women's tasks and men's tasks and some done by both sexes. The former excluded land preparation but included planting, weeding and harvesting. On days not allocated to *gandu* labour, women and junior males have the right to deploy their own labour in agricultural activities upon land provided by the household head. In the case of wives, this constituted part of the contractual obligation within marriage to enable a woman to provide herself with *menus besoins* (minor necessities) in the way of clothes and additional items of food for herself and her children. Further examples of these 'contracts' were described: women care for the small livestock belonging to members of the household, including their own, and in return may dispose of that part of the milk not required for household consumption. On the other hand, the household head owns the manure, since the livestock are stabled in his compound.

The report suggests that the work women do on their own plots encompasses all tasks, although in theory their husbands are obliged to assist in planting. Women cultivate any or all of the crops available, and claim to sell the produce on the market to gain a private cash income. However, it is made clear that women's opportunity to cultivate their own fields is secondary to all obligations to work on the household fields, which, with the addition of the tyranny of domestic tasks such as carrying water, pounding millet and so on, constituted the bulk of their work.

The sexual division of labour is described in terms of a system of reciprocity: rights and duties being balanced and sanctified by custom. A striking example of this tendency in the analysis is the description of some women's labour on household fields as 'helping their husband'. This expression is suggestive of two things. First, it implies a cultural evaluation of women's labour which renders it non-comparable to men's: women may do the same task as men but their labour is regarded as subsidiary, literally auxiliary, not crucial to the enterprise but merely a free gift offered in the spirit of conjugal harmony, with presumably non-material rewards. Secondly, it suggests that any change occurring in the allocation of tasks between the sexes will not be recognised Since women only 'help', this is, provide auxiliary labour, their work does not become embodied in the corpus of cultural represention of the sexual division of labour. Moreover, it is represented as occurring under the exceptional circumstances of a man requiring additional labour. In fact the problem could well be that there is a chronic shortage of *male* labour; rather than helping men, women may well be *substituting* for them. Indeed there is some evidence that women see it this way: lacking the power to resist directly efforts to increase their work load, women now invoke the authority of Islam to reject the notion that they should work in *gandu* at all (see Nicolas, 1975: 181).

An increasing proportion of the produce of *gandu* is sold on the market through the co-operatives, yet women have no customary right of direct access to this cash income despite their contribution to household production. It should be said that household heads' ability to meet financial demands on this income has deteriorated sharply, and it has been argued that only the wealthiest men are able to keep junior male kin in *gandu*. Nonetheless the position of junior males and of women in *gandu* is rarely contrasted; in fact, it is quite different. Men can, and do, earn cash through migrant labour, and through agricultural labour on days when they are free from household labour obligations. Moreover, having direct access to land from the village, they can establish their own household. In theory, women have access to land from their paternal households. In fact in the case of either divorce or widowhood, they are not encouraged to remain for long without a husband and only under exceptional circumstances operate a farm enterprise on their own account.

It does not seem likely that *Animation Féminine* ever intended to get inside the household and consider the ways and means by which women might more effectively obtain greater control over the resources to which their labour had contributed. This is ironic given that it is precisely in the house-

hold that women are integrated into the processes of agricultural development as labourers on household farms. The assumptions built into the research concerning the principle of reciprocity and tradition which govern the sexual division of labour led to a foregone conclusion in this respect. At the same time, such assumptions were embedded in the analysis of women's independent activities which became the target of the *Animation Féminine* action programme. As we noted, this enabled women to gain access to agricultural inputs (improved seed, fertiliser) for their own fields, and to improve their stock of small livestock. Village *Animatrices* were elected and given short courses (more cursory but on the same principle as those offered to men) and charged with the responsibility of passing on information to and taking orders from their clientele.

A large number of the elected *Animatrices* were widows or divorcées. Both *Animation Féminine* and some of the *Animatrices* with whom I spoke explained that this was because married women would not be permitted to attend day courses away from the village. The agricultural operations in which they were instructed were initially restricted to planting density, fungicide treatment and manure application. In 1976, some *Animatrices* were allowed to order fertiliser.[7] The *Animation Féminine* personnel soon reported that women's fields were already more densely planted than those of the household since, having so little land made available to them (usually not more than 0.25ha) they were forced to exploit it to the maximum. In addition, the priority of *gandu* meant that women's plots were often planted late and generally risked lower yields. Women were also already applying manure to their fields, despite the fact that in formal terms compound manure was the property of household heads. *Animation Féminine* pointed out rather wryly that women were managing to spirit this out of the compound. However this was a mixed triumph. Having applied manure to their plots for one or two years and raised the level of fertility, women's plots were reappropriated for *gandu* use. Thus the *gandu* enjoyed part of the investment of women's labour in their quasi-independent sphere of production. Although some agronomists assert that the application of household manure to farm plots in the quantity available does not substantially increase fertility, no such opinion is shared by the farmers. They saw themselves as gaining a substantial advantage from women in this respect (and laughed about it): the women were angry. Men even admitted that they always gave the worst plots of land to women so that they could be improved before being returned to *gandu*.

The re-appropriation of land was explained in terms of the acute land shortage being felt by many households. Women's conjugal right to land, however, under this situation, emerged as a condition of dependency, not of reciprocity. Rights became concessions. Moreover, there were cases where women were not given any land at all. Thus under conditions of land shortage and of male labour shortage, it seems more likely that women's quasi-independent production will be increasingly encroached upon. Despite this, their obligations to provide additional food and clothing for their children appear to be increasing, largely because the capacity of the household to make ends meet at all is declining. Indeed, one authority suggests that women have been left to feed and clothe themselves and their children without access to household granaries during the period of men's absence during the dry season. The product of *gandu* is kept until the men return to plant the fields. But their return, as one group of women told me is often an additional burden: "When they come home, they are hungry, sick and exhausted and cannot do any work".

There are other ways in which women's ability to develop their economic activities is constrained by their relationship to men. Both men and women wanted fertilisers but the supply made available through *Animation Féminine* more often than not is simply taken over by men. Again, in one village men were able to purchase all the allotment of improved breeds of poultry because the women could not raise the few hundred francs to buy them on the day they arrived.

Further examples of the ways in which women's conjugal rights deteriorate could be provided. However, the main problems are now clear. The *Animation Féminine* Programme was directed to integrating women in the development process by providing them with access to the skills and material resources already provided, in principle, to men, in order to increase their cash earnings. This objective was a condition of the notion that the benefits of development can be redistributed through participation in the market. Since the bulk of women's labour was already committed to unpaid household production, attention was focused on a subsidiary aspect of women's activities. But the relationship between the two arenas of women's contribution to the economy was examined only in terms of a concept of the

7 The Rural Development Project had encouraged and experimented with the use of fertiliser but with not very satisfactory results. Animation Féminine were more cautious.

sexual division of labour which privileged the notion of reciprocity rather than dependency, of formal rights and duties in marriage rather than of domestic relations of production in households integrated into the changing conditions of production imposed by the Niger economy as a whole.

Any sexual division of labour is susceptible to change, however permanent its cultural representation, and it experiences change as a function of its position in the rural economy in the process of change. The failure to allow for this seems to have arisen from a concept of integration which implies that those sectors such as women or partially self-provisioning households have not yet experienced development.

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