
Summaries

Gender Myths that Instrumentalise Women: A View from the Indian Frontline

Srilatha Batliwala and Deepa Dhanraj

This article explores how gender myths – feminist ideas adopted and then distorted by development agencies and the state – are aiding religious fundamentalism and neo-liberal economic reforms in a process that instrumentalises poor women in India and reframes their role as citizens. The authors examine the dynamic of two particular gender myths: (1) that giving women access to economic resources leads to their overall empowerment and (2) that with increased access to political power, women will opt for progressive and transformatory politics. The article analyses the operation of these myths in the context of two state-sponsored initiatives in India. It attempts to demonstrate that so-called economic empowerment programmes can both depoliticise and disempower poor women and shift the onus of poverty alleviation from the state to poor women, while simultaneously delimiting women's citizenship. It then discusses how fundamentalist forces can and have seized the resulting spaces for women's political participation, mobilising women in support of their agenda. Based on their analysis of these specific experiences, the authors call for critical reflection by feminists and for revitalised strategies to face these challenges.

Dangerous Equations? How Female-headed Households Became the Poorest of the Poor: Causes, Consequences and Cautions

Sylvia Chant

This article interrogates the common assumption that a large part of the so-called “feminisation of poverty” in recent decades is due to the progressive “feminisation of household headship”. Its specific aims are threefold. The first is to summarise how and why women-headed households have come to be widely equated with the “poorest of the poor” in development discourse. The second is to trace the evolution of challenges to this stereotype from a growing and increasingly diverse body of macro-

and micro-level research. The third is to explore some of the implications and outcomes of competing constructions of female household headship, especially in relation to policy. At one end of the spectrum, what kinds of attitudes and actions flow out of the mantra that female-headed households are the “poorest of the poor”? At the other extreme, what happens when the links between the “feminisation of poverty” and the “feminisation of household headship” are disrupted? The article reflects on the potential consequences of acknowledging that the epithet ‘women-headed households are the poorest of the poor’ may be more “fable” than “fact”.

Within the Edifice of Development: Education of Women in India

Rekha Pappu

The widespread faith in the transformative powers of education notwithstanding, the reality shows that the results of making available literacy/education have not lived up to what now seem like mythic expectations. Despite evidence of this failure, emphasis on providing education continues. This article attempts to understand the reasons for this by tracking the frameworks that have justified education for women in four different moments. Focusing on the present moment, the article argues that the shifts noted in the present time are predominantly influenced by economic agendas in which the lives of individual women or even communities of women are not taken into consideration. The article argues that a corrective to the invocation of education in the abstract would be to deliberate on the content of education and the pedagogic approach to be adopted, and to oppose the hierarchies that ensue from differential systems of education for the rich and the poor.

The NGO-isation of Arab Women's Movements

Islah Jad

The article examines the implications of the proliferation of Arab women's non-governmental organisations (NGOs), assessing the extent to which this should be seen as evidence of a more vibrant

civil society, or, more accurately, as a response to Western, particularly American, hegemony. The current proliferation has taken place in the context of increasing American attention to the “democratisation” and “modernisation” of Arab societies. However, the NGO as a form of organisation is different in critical ways from social movements. Analysing this difference is useful in revealing the limitations of NGOs in introducing genuine and sustainable development. Thus, Arab women’s NGOs may be able to play a role in advocating Arab women’s rights in the international arena, providing services for needy groups, proposing new policies and visions, generating and disseminating information. But for comprehensive and sustainable development, a different form of organisation is needed with a more locally grounded vision and a more sustainable power basis for social change.

Headlines and Head-space: Challenging Gender Planning Orthodoxy in Area-based Urban Development

Jo Beall and Alison Todes

Drawing on the experience of a highly acclaimed area-based urban development initiative in Cato Manor, a central area of Durban, this article explores the way in which the project engaged with women and took up issues of gender. In this, as in other areas of planning practice, the Cato Manor Development Association exhibited surprisingly good practice. It consulted both women and men, ran a vernacular community paper to reach those who found it difficult to attend meetings, often prioritised the expressed needs of women, and anticipated what would help foster harmonious gender relations in urban design, for example in the design of parks and amenities. Project design and documents were devoid of much reference to women and gender and were unscathed by the imprint of gender planning, and the article therefore explores why a focus on gender was so central to implementation. The article concludes that gender planning is not the only way in which development initiatives can bring positive change to the conditions of women’s lives and lead to the transformation of gender relations. Indeed, even when a gender focus did inform the initiative, it would not have been effective without the historical experience and political and policy conditions allowing for women’s active public engagement.

Cracking Cashew Nut Myths? The Challenges of Gendered Policy Research in the Cashew Sector in Mozambique

Nazneen Kanji and Carin Vijfhuizen

This article explores myth-breaking and myth-making in feminist policy research. Using examples from a study of men and women’s work in the cashew sector in Mozambique, the article presents findings on women farmers’ access to and control over land and trees and the gender division of labour and benefits in cashew processing factories. While findings contested representations of women’s involvement in the cashew sector in earlier research (cracking some myths), it also discusses the tensions and challenges involved in translating findings into policy messages, so as not to create further (different) myths. The first tension results from the need to analyse structural conditions of gender subordination while showing women’s agency and avoiding passive representations of women as victims. The second tension concerns the tendency of policy discourses to generalise and oversimplify social and political realities. Challenges also arise from the pressures to provide policy messages relating to gender equality in an overall framework that emphasises poverty reduction within an essentially market-oriented, neo-liberal approach to development.

Not Very Poor, Powerless or Pregnant: The African Woman Forgotten by Development

Everjoyce J. Win

The poor, powerless and pregnant African woman is development’s favourite image. NGOs, donors and media have used it for decades. But does this image tell the whole complex story of African women’s lives? Is material poverty the dominant factor defining the position and condition of the African woman? In this article, I challenge everyone to go beyond this image towards a deeper and more meaningful understanding of the realities of African women’s lives. While those of us who are not necessarily poor, nor always powerless, nor invariably pregnant, might appear to have comparatively better lives than our sisters, we suffer under the same yoke of patriarchy and unequal power relations. From HIV and AIDS, to violence and denial of rights in the public sphere, the non-poor African has to fight not only for her rights but

also for her own legitimacy at macro- and micro-levels. Delegitimised by donors and other actors, the non-poor woman often seeks legitimacy through telling the stories of others, who equally disown her as not really one of them. Development practitioners and policy-makers are challenged to engage with this “new” African woman.

Gender Mainstreaming: What is it (About) and Should we Continue Doing it?

Prudence Woodford-Berger

Gender mainstreaming began to receive attention in Sweden and other Nordic countries in the late 1980s, and was established firmly on the global development agenda as a result of the UN Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995. It has aimed at reducing the gap between policy intentions and actual results, and is a long-term, strategic process whereby “gender” is systematically integrated into all (development) systems, structures and practices. The purpose of gender mainstreaming is to prompt changes in institutional practice and to promote progress toward the goals of women’s empowerment and gender equality, key policy concerns and goals that reflect a feminist heritage. The article examines the narrative of gender mainstreaming in the Swedish case. Considered one of the most “gender-equal” countries in the world, Sweden has embarked on implementation of a gender equality policy through gender mainstreaming. Gender mainstreaming is based on the endorsement of a form of national feminist theory that underlies the models for gender analysis in most fields of Swedish policy and political decision making. Gender mainstreaming is bound up with “Swedishness”, something that plays a significant role in the translation of policy into practice.

Battles Over Booklets: Gender Myths in the British Aid Programme

Rosalind Eyben

Official policy documents are outcomes of intensely fought internal struggles. Through an analysis of a series of publicity booklets produced by the British aid programme between 1986 and 1998, this article explores how particular ways of thinking about women and gender were taken up by one donor agency. Based on the author’s own experience, the article identifies the underlying processes related

to power and knowledge that shaped a protracted and evolving bureaucratic contest over the text and pictures each booklet contained. The article explores how certain gender myths were used by the various contestants either to preserve or transform a policy agenda as represented in these booklets. In that contest, myths or stories were selected to resonate with the wider currents of ideology that were shaping aid policy at the time of each booklet’s production. The article considers the external and internal political environment to which each booklet was responding and links the key policy messages of the booklets with the gender myths that each contains.

Gender, Myth and Fable: The Perils of Mainstreaming in Sector Bureaucracies

Hilary Standing

This article examines how gender and development discourses and frameworks were appropriated into development policy and practice through gender mainstreaming efforts in developing country sector bureaucracies. It uses an example of an attempt to mainstream gender equity objectives into a large health sector programme in a national bureaucracy heavily reliant on external aid. It argues that these efforts mis-specify the nature and role of bureaucracies. A health sector bureaucracy should be expected to improve health systems, not act as an engine of social and political transformation. This is linked to failure to understand the policy domain and how gender and development advocates can engage with it. Two main questions are explored. How did the project of social transformation become translated into practice in the increasingly professionalised world of gender and development? How were the links between theory, policy and practice rendered unproblematic by naivety about “policy” and how progressive change comes about?

Making Sense of Gender in Shifting Institutional Contexts: Some Reflections on Gender Mainstreaming

Ramya Subrahmanian

As long as gender mainstreaming has been an aspect of the feminist engagement with development, there have been those who have warned of the dangers of political dilution, those that have opposed the

takeover of feminist agendas by the state, and the dangers of “co-option”. Yet engagement with the state has been critical for furthering inclusive citizenship, and commitments to gender equality and women’s empowerment are ubiquitous and often genuine. How do we make sense of these diverse trends? This article offers some reflections on gender mainstreaming, arguing for reviewing its achievements both in the wider context of transformative possibilities, and also in a more modest perspective, scaling down expectations of what it can achieve.

Mainstreaming Gender or “Streaming” Gender Away: Feminists Marooned in the Development Business

Maitrayee Mukhopadhyay

This article analyses the fate of gender mainstreaming, the strategy adopted at the UN Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing to forward the gender equality agenda within development institutions. Using case studies from Mukhopadhyay’s own research and advisory work, she shows how the political project of gender equality is being normalised in the development business as an ahistorical, apolitical, de-contextualised and technical project that leaves the prevailing and unequal power relations intact. She suggests that in repositioning gender in development policy and practice we need to consider how to get back to the political project while not abandoning the present mode of engagement with development institutions. Citing the experiences of a recently concluded action research programme undertaken by the Royal Tropical Institute, Amsterdam, in collaboration with organisations in South Asia and Southern Africa, the author suggests that getting back to the political project involves working on rights and citizenship issues within development institutions and on the outside to create a “voice” of the most marginalised and their organisation.

‘Streetwalkers Show the Way’: Reframing the Debate on Trafficking from Sex Workers’ Perspective

Nandinee Bandyopadhyay with Swapna Gayen, Rama Debnath, Kajol Bose, Sikha Das, Geeta Das, M. Das, Manju Biswas, Pushpa

Sarkar, Putul Singh, Rashoba Bibi, Rekha Mitra and Sudipta Biswas

Challenging the dominant discourses on trafficking which fail to include or reflect the experiences of those who are trafficked into a range of labour markets every year, and deny the trafficked “victims” any possibility of autonomy or voice, Durbar, an organised forum of sex workers based in West Bengal, has intervened into the debate on trafficking and has offered creative, inclusive and effective ways of thinking about and acting on the issue. The article recounts the stories of women who had once been trafficked, to understand why and how some women get trafficked, and more critically, how they exercise their agency to get out of the trafficked condition. In analysing these stories and Durbar’s position on and intervention against trafficking, the article also explores the ways in which a marginalised group of poor women can claim citizenship rights by participating in public discourses and voicing and actualising their demand for self-determination.

The Chimera of Success

Maxine Molyneux

This article examines the evidence for the claim that gender has been so successfully mainstreamed into development policy that there is now little need for women’s projects and programmes, as the job of creating “gender awareness” is done. It argues that despite a widespread recognition in development agencies that “gender matters”, this all too often translates into the token, partial and selective incorporation of gender awareness into public/international policy, so evident in anti-poverty programmes. Reflecting on how to assess the impact of the Beijing process, the article concludes that if gender analysis is to be more than another policy tool, it needs to be accompanied by some strategy for achieving gender *justice* as part of a broader commitment to greater social and economic equality. This is unlikely to happen without the political will, vision and strategy provided by collective action.

Women, Work and Empowerment in a Global Era

Ruth Pearson

This article highlights a basic contradiction in much feminist analysis of women and work in the current era of globalisation. It questions the assumption

that women's access to employment and/or income leads to women's emancipation and empowerment. Given increased needs for money to access basic services, women's participation in the market economy is often survival-oriented and has little effect on structural changes in gender relations. Whether gained from micro-credit loans to finance home businesses or from export-producing factory work, women's earnings are generally low and do not offer them entitlements to social protection. Poor women need money, but increases in wages will not on their own empower women. Improvements in conditions and returns from work must be coupled with assurances of minimum income, access to affordable and high-quality services and a healthy environment that is not blighted by community and domestic violence.

Demythologising Gender in Development: Feminist Studies in African Contexts

Amina Mama

Feminist scholars seeking to maintain the link between theory and practice face multiple challenges as a result of the complex nexus between diverse gender politics and international development formulae. The most salient of these arise from the tension between the liberal strategy of entering mainstream institutions and networks, and the radical politics that emanate from feminist analyses of local conditions. Feminists in African contexts therefore face the intense challenges of developing innovative intellectual, pedagogical and institutional strategies, despite their weak organisational bases. The transformative capacity of feminist studies has so far depended on the capacity of African feminist thinkers to navigate the increasingly fraught intersections between local institutional demands, global development imperatives and their own visions of gender-just societies.

With a Little Help From our Friends: "Global" Incentives and "Local" Challenges to Feminist Politics in Brazil

Cecilia M.B. Sardenberg

The author's comments regarding the major challenges facing feminists working to achieve gender justice in the context of development today are outlined by current circumstances in Brazil. More specifically, they focus on the process launched

by the Lula government which established 2004 as *Ano da Mulher* (Women's Year), and is organising the First National Conference on Policies for Women (*I Conferência Nacional de Políticas para Mulheres*), to take place 15–18 July in Brasília. This article looks at these recent developments in terms of the impact of global feminisms on local struggles, calling attention to the specific challenges to feminist politics in contemporary Brazil.

The Rights-based Approach to Development: Potential for Change or More of the Same?

Dzodzi Tsikata

This article discusses the implications of the adoption of rights-based approaches (RBAs) to development by the UN and its agencies, bilateral development agencies and international development NGOs. While this has allowed human rights language into the world of development programming, a development which has been met with much approval, sceptical voices argue that the development industry has taken the high-minded concerns of human rights instruments and moulded them to its own purposes and that not much is likely to change in policies and programmes. Given the critique of the RBA on grounds of its refusal to interrogate economic liberalisation, its implied reliance on the legal apparatus and its exaggerated claims, it is open to question whether it will deliver development based on human rights. The concerns raised about the RBA signal the need for caution on the part of feminists, especially in the light of how the development industry has digested previous analyses and approaches.

Political Fiction Meets Gender Myth: Post-conflict Reconstruction, "Democratisation" and Women's Rights

Deniz Kandiyoti

This article aims to draw attention to the fact that gender issues are becoming politicised in novel and counterproductive ways in a new geopolitical context where armed interventions usher in blueprints for governance underwritten by international donors and global institutions. These blueprints include efforts at gender mainstreaming, against the background of a new conventional wisdom concerning the need to include women in post-conflict reconstruction, backed by UN Security

Council Resolution 1325. Using the case of post-Taliban Afghanistan, an attempt is made to demonstrate that technocratic blueprints that do not take account of the nature of political settlements (or lack thereof) in specific post-conflict contexts are likely to remain ineffective at best, or to backfire, inadvertently exposing and disempowering the constituencies that most need support. The type of intervention that involves patient capacity and coalition building far exceeds the time frames and resources of interventions dominated by “project” cycles.

Reinvigorating Autonomous Feminist Spaces

Anne Marie Goetz

The de-politicisation of gender equity goals that occurs through gender mainstreaming can be combated through building a stronger external

feminist support base for “femocrats” inside development agencies, and by attempting to produce a more coherent set of alternatives to current market-based development planning orthodoxies. A stronger external feminist support base will make the project of gender “mainstreaming” more closely resemble feminist infiltration than assimilation to dominant development approaches – an assimilation that has required gender equity concerns to fit themselves in on the sidelines. A serious critique and evolution of alternatives to market-centered dogmas will engage with the governance agenda and will seek to strengthen states in their role as arenas for pursuing redistributive projects. Autonomous feminist associational activity and institutional experimentation is essential to provide the creativity needed for this project.