



WOMEN

AND

DEVELOPMENT

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Governance and Women's Poverty: Scheming for Women

This book has pursued two themes relating to gender differences in field workers' experiences. The first is about the *gendered nature of organisations*. This has involved understanding how gendered features of organisational hierarchies, and the organisation of space and time in development work, create practical constraints for women's management capabilities. More profound constraints on women's leadership capacities are created by gendered organisational cultures, gendered incentive and accountability system and gendered patterns and preferences in the expression of authority. The second theme is about the *gendered process of policy implementation*. This is about the potential substance of women's leadership in development. I have suggested that an incipient emancipatory perspective on women's rights in development can be found in the work practices and perspectives of women field workers in establishing a responsive mutually respectful, and respective relationship between the organisation and its clients. The findings in this book suggest that women staff might be even more effective agents for their clients if they were liberated from the constraints imposed by the gender-influenced nature of the organisations in which they work.

There is a third and much broader theme which brings these first two themes together: it is about *institutional capacity building in development from a gendered perspective*: getting development institutions right for women staff and women clients. This is an old theme in the gender and development field. It is about seeking public responses for women's needs and at the same time, enabling women themselves to have control over how those needs are defined and satisfied. It is about how women's concerns are expressed in and integrated into development policies—whether as welfare problems, as solutions to poverty or efficiency agendas, as matters workers of legal equity, or as a challenge of social and political empowerment. The way women's needs and interests have been articulated and acted upon in each set of development approaches has had consequences for women's experiences of these processes (Kandiyoti 1988; Razavi and Miller 1995). For example, development

interventions may position women as passive recipients of charitable donations, or as autonomous agents capable of making their own decisions about their priority needs and the best ways of responding to them. This final chapter begins by expanding on this third theme, and ends by showing how this book's findings lend themselves to an analytical framework for investigating the gendered nature of other organisations.

Capacity Building from a Gender Perspective

Getting institutions right was a central preoccupation in the development field of the 1990s. This was a response to the failure of many developing countries in the 1970s and 1980s to get prices right in the macroeconomic policy reform packages urged on them by international financial institutions. Structural adjustment, liberalisation, privatisation and decentralisation were proposed as solutions to problems of systemic inflation, balance-of-payments crises, and crippling foreign debt, all of which were seen as consequences of public-sector inefficiency, government overspending and under taxation, and corruption. Central to that policy reform agenda was a deep mistrust of the state as the captive of self-seeking interest groups using public power for private gain. Policy reforms, therefore, targeted the public sector for radical surgery, sharply reducing the extent of government action in the economy, and seeking to improve public administration and public services by trimming the civil service and reducing civil servants' decision-making discretion. By the late 1980s and early 1990s, these policies had delivered a few success stories in Asia and Africa in the shape of healthier growth rates, but the more common experience was that acute fiscal constraints sparked recession, squeezed public spending on areas of most importance to the poor—health and education—while liberalisation only unevenly triggered the expected market response.

In many countries, adjustment measures seemed to have, if anything, exacerbated problems of social inequality and poverty. A sea change in development thinking, prompted in part by the new institutional economics (North 1990), has led some development specialists to reassess the role of the public sector in regulating markets (Haggard, Kauffman and Evans 1992; Killick 1989). The primary concern is to see the state supporting key institutions for effective markets, such as the institution of private property rights, or legal enforcement of the sanctity of contracts (Schiavo-Campo 1994). Public sector efficiency and financial accountability is still the bottom line of institutional capacity-building in the public sector. But a related concern is to support the role of the state in promoting a social agenda, to compensate for the sometimes corrosive effects of unregulated markets on some social groups, such as the poor. This has become part of a broader agenda promoting good government.

Although gender inequality is rarely mentioned in these policy debates except as a human rights concern, or a matter which civil society might take up, there is space for thinking about institutional capacity-building from a gendered perspective: how can institutions

be reoriented to respond to the interests not just of the poor, but of poor women? The new interest in linking institutional capacity-building to social-equity agendas has picked up on two classic theme in the literature on public administration and the sociology of organisations which reappear from time to time in the development literature. The first is the politics of promoting redistributive policies through bureaucracies which may be linked to dominant class interests—the politics, in Ascher's phrase, of scheming for the poor (1984). The second theme has to do with the work environment and personal attitudes of actual policy implementers—agricultural extension workers, family-planning workers, street-level bureaucrats. Social-equity concerns are raised in both themes; gender issues are considered in neither.

Studying the politics of promoting redistributive policies through development bureaucracies reveals that bureaucracies are not neutral, apolitical arenas, and the practice of administration is not a mechanical process of low-level functionaries following top-level instructions. Instead, implementation involves political struggles over conflicting interests of different groups, particularly where privileged groups stand to lose out to the poor (Cleaves 1980; Honadle 1982; White 1987). Here, the concern is to overcome political and bureaucratic opposition to a more equitable sharing of resources and social rights. Analysts of public administration have always pointed out that any policy to redistribute existing resources away from privileged groups is bound to attract more bureaucratic and social opposition than either regulatory policies or policies which distribute resources from a new or external source (Lowi 1964; Thomas and Grindle 1990). This problem has received particular attention in the development field in discussions of the challenge of promoting land reform (Ascher 1984; Kohli 1987), and of promoting propoor spending as part of economic reform and structural adjustment agendas (Nelson 1989).

Gender and development policies, as expressions of an interest in redistributing resources and power between women and men, have not figured at all in mainstream discussions of the politics of generating a consensus for redistributive policies. The reason for the absence of gender policies from discussions of redistributive policies is that GAD policy has been fairly marginal to discussions of economic and social policy reform. GAD policies still tend to be expressed through small pilot projects on the margins of important development initiatives, with small time bound budgets, and are often implemented by either peripheral government bureaux or by small NGOs (Buvinic 1985, 1987). Those policies which are directly targeted at a large population of a country's female population, such as family-planning policies or the promotion of girls' education, tend not to be formulated redistributive matters even though they can and often do, in the long run, fundamentally change the distribution of knowledge, and power over reproduction, between women and men.

There are reasons why gender issues have not been adequately addressed in discussions of anti-poverty policies. First, some policy makers fail to appreciate the gender-differentiated nature of the experience of poverty, and hence assume, incorrectly, that poor women benefit

equally with poor men from any political victories which such policies can achieve over the interests of privileged groups. Second, where it is indeed recognised that women face particular constraints in struggling out of poverty, they are sometimes targeted, reductively, as an especially immiserated group. This applies most to the category of female-headed households (Jackson 1996). Suddenly labelled the 'deserving' poor, their needs tend to invoke direct charitable donations, not redistribution, or the restructuring of social institutions. The problem of the persistent 'misbehaviour' (Buvinic 1985) of gender policy—the persistent rerouting of gender-redistributive goals into measures which pathologise women's needs into matters for welfare provision—suggest that there are gender dimensions to problems of implementation capacity in the institutions and organisations which promote these policies.

The second resurrected theme in current 'good governance' efforts to improve public sector efficiency is the importance of understanding the perspectives, practices, motivations and impact of frontline development workers. Here, the concern is to understand the influence of policy implementers on policy outcomes to find ways of enhancing their receptivity and responsiveness to the needs of their least empowered clients, and to promote a sense of trust between public workers and clients. An interest in the perspectives and practices of development administrators has long been a preoccupation of those concerned with grassroots and NGO development practices (Chambers 1997; Esman 1991; Esman and Uphoff 1984; Montgomery 1988; Uphoff and Esman 1974). It also crops up periodically in literature on programme implementation: from work on agricultural extension workers in Kenya in the 1970s (Leonard 1977; Staudt 1978a, 1978b), to exciting recent work on the factors creating 'commitment among preventative health-care workers in north-east Brazil (Tendler and Freedheim 1994). In South Asia, there has been an enduring interest in the training, socialisation and policy-enactment behaviours of higher level civil servants — the Indian Administrative Service (IAS) officers (Heiginbotham 1975; Kothari and Roy 1969; Potter 1986, Ram 1978), and in the 1980s this tradition was extended to the study of development administrators and lower-level development workers in Bangladesh (Wood 1986, 1988). Lately, the puzzle of how to improve the capacity of public institutions to perform effectively, efficiently, and honestly (let alone to develop a particular receptivity to the interests of the poor) has ignited a renewed interest in the ways incentive structures, organisational cultures, training, and management structures affect the performance and commitment of lower- and mid-level staff (Grindle and Hilderbrand 1995; Thomas and Grindle 1990; Tendler and Freedheim 1994).

In this literature on the perspectives and influence of development administrators on policy outcomes, there is relatively little attention to gender issues. There are two reasons for this. First, in many countries, until recently, the only places in the public service where women were found in significant numbers were education and health, and even there they were rarely in senior positions. Women the world over have been in marked minorities at higher levels of decision-making in public services and even in the leadership ranks of the

non-governmental sector. Women tend to be particularly scarce in the development service sectors of importance to economic policy: finance, industry, infrastructure, or agriculture.

Second, gender biases have prevented some analysts of policy implementation processes from noticing the gender-differential impact of the work of development administrators. A sharp illustration of this is the contrast between the work of David Leonard and Kathleen Staudt in Western Kenya in the second half of the 1970s. Both, independently, investigated the same problem—the low uptake of new production technologies for maize cultivation—in the same part of Kenya. Both focused upon the work of extension agents to determine why uptake of new maize inputs was so low and why progressive farmers were proving relatively ineffective in helping to disseminate new farming methods. Leonard identified a set of ethnicity-based vertical solidarities among the staff of the agriculture department which cut across hierarchical divides and, indeed, transcended the divide between the organisation and its clients. This informal power network conflicted with the pattern of value-neutral responsiveness which extension agents were expected to exhibit in dealing with their clients, creating favouritism in staff-client interactions which neither served the interests of efficient production nor effective technique diffusion.

Staudt, in contrast, began with the observation that the majority of potentially innovative or progressive farmers who were being overlooked by extension staff were women. The bias towards male farmers of the extension staff (98 per cent of whom were men) responsible for selecting innovators regardless of sex made their work inefficient. It caused them, regardless of ethnicity, to ignore innovative women farmers (Staudt 1978a). The contrast between the two studies is not just of academic interest; each study points to a very different set of implications for policy. Any policy of bureaucratic reform which might be designed to overcome the inefficiencies caused by ethnic biases which Leonard identified would have no impact whatsoever on the sexism of the agricultural extension service, and thus would fail to tackle the problem of the exclusion of women farmers from agricultural modernisation processes.

An approach to institutional capacity-building in development which is concerned to enhance the benefits to women from engaging with public development institutions must be informed by an appreciation of both the gendered politics of development policy-making, and the practicalities of institutional change to support responsive provider-client behaviour in service delivery for women. Each theme is discussed in turn below.

✓ **The Politics of Promoting Gender-equity Policies**

Political obstacles to gender-equity policies have sometimes been explained as a problem of insufficient political will. This concept is too vague to be of much use; it does not direct attention to the real problems of generating political support for socially unpopular policies, and it underestimates the often high degrees of political will which do exist amongst many national leaders, but which cannot be translated into results because of insufficient political