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## Women in International Development Theory, Policy and Progress

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**WOMEN IN INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT  
THEORY, POLICY AND PROGRESS**

By

Melina Tew

Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree

of

DEPARTMENT HONORS

in

International Studies

Approved:

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The Platform for Action of the Fourth World Conference on Women (1995)

states: "Equality between women and men is a matter of human rights and a condition for social justice and is also a necessary and fundamental prerequisite for equality, development and peace."<sup>1</sup> As this statement suggests, women are indispensable to any program in the developing world desiring sustainable, effective development. Despite efforts to thwart gender inequality, more women than men still live below the poverty line, and there is a global gender gap in levels of education and access to resources. In response to these conditions, the UN Population Fund reported the following:

"Programmes that reduce gender inequality can significantly improve individual and household welfare and national economic growth. If sub-Saharan Africa, South and West Asia had had the same female-male ratio in years of schooling that East Asia did in 1960, and had closed the education gender gap at the rate achieved by East Asia from 1960 to 1992, their per capita income could have grown by an additional 0.5 to 0.9 percentage points per year in sub-Saharan Africa, 1.7 per cent in South Asia and 2.2 per cent in West Asia."<sup>2</sup>

Fortunately, many development planners now recognize the necessity of including women in policy planning and implementation. However, this progress has faced decades of challenges due to governmental support, funding, and ingrained ideas of the meaning of modernization. This paper examines the birth and progress of theories on women in international development as well as the direction this field of study should take in the future. To provide a basis for this discussion, one must first understand the

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<sup>1</sup> The United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women. Beijing, China. September, 1995. Online information found at <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/>

<sup>2</sup> *State of the World Population 2002*. United Nations Population Fund Publication. 2002. Online version found at <http://www.unfpa.org/swp/2002/>

roots of international focus on development. Then, it is necessary to discuss the most prevalent development theories arising in the middle of the twentieth century. This discussion will also include an examination of policies based on these theories. The subsequent sections will introduce theories of women in development and provide an analysis of policies stemming from these perspectives. Following the theoretical discussions will be an analysis of current reforms and their limitations. Finally, the paper will conclude with recommendations for improving development programs, emphasizing the importance of women in these projects.

### **Theories of development**

#### *Emergence of the Development Project:*

After World War II, the victorious powers faced the self-appointed task of reordering the world system. Massive shifts in balance of power and new prescriptions for reconstruction began to enter into policymaking circles. Foreign-exchange problems created by the war also awakened the emerging world powers to the importance of international economics. In 1944, a group of prominent national leaders and policymakers from the major powers as well as many smaller states gathered at a cozy retreat in Bretton Woods, New Hampshire to discuss what lay ahead in this new world system and how best to manage it. The philosophy of free trade and the promotion of democracy were pre-eminent in this discussion. The delegates held the belief that policies encouraging free trade and capitalism would ultimately improve economic conditions at a global level.

Following these principles, they established three major international economic organizations that would “promote international monetary cooperation and facilitate the expansion of international trade.”<sup>3</sup> The International Monetary Fund was created to stabilize currency and act as a forum for issues of international payments. The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, or the World Bank, was formed as a lending institution to assist in the reconstruction and development of poorer countries. Finally, the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) was organized as an intergovernmental system of maintaining free trade through mutual agreements and standards. This group of agreements later became the World Trade Organization (WTO).

The Bretton Woods institutions, as these came to be called, would prove to be instrumental in the development of impoverished countries. During the years following the war, there was heightened focus on self-determination and the promotion of democracy. The major powers had agreed to encourage these ideals and the new world order would provide the means to do so. The Development Project was born. This project was defined as “an organized strategy of national economic growth and an international system of development assistance.”<sup>4</sup> This assistance would be guided by the principles of free trade and facilitated by the aforementioned institutions.

This Development Project became increasingly active in subsequent decades, and throughout the entire the Cold War. Between 1944 and 1985, 96 countries achieved their independence. The populations of these countries constituted 1/3 of the world’s people—a phenomenal number considering that so many people had been under external control

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<sup>3</sup> Microsoft© Encarta© Encyclopedia 2001. ©1993-2000 Microsoft Corporation. Found on website: [http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/commandingheights/shared/minitextlo/info\\_brettonwoods.html](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/commandingheights/shared/minitextlo/info_brettonwoods.html) March 6, 2004.

<sup>4</sup> Mannon, Susan K. Lecture material SOC 4730, Utah State University, January 9, 2004.

prior to that time.<sup>5</sup> Equally notable is the fact that millions of people were suddenly thrown into independence after having been dependent for so long. They did not have the means to maintain the independence for which they fought. As these countries struggled with poverty and political turmoil, alternatives to democracy had greater appeal. During the Cold War years, the world was divided into First, Second, and Third World countries. These less developed countries constituted the latter. The fear that Third World countries would turn to communism, or to the Second World, for aid was another major push for the U.S. and other Western powers to provide development assistance.

Along with this new international focus came theories to explain the causes of Third World<sup>6</sup> underdevelopment and how the situation might be remedied.

Modernization theory was the first to gain prominence, followed by Dependency and World Systems. A detailed discussion of these theories and their prescriptions follows.

#### *Modernization Theory:*

Modernization theory naturally evolved around the capitalist paradigm made so accessible by the world organizers after the war. Proponents of this theory also held the belief that through continuing free trade and promoting capitalism, poor countries would eventually be able to catch up to the rich countries. As indicated, Modernization theory divided the world into modern societies and traditional societies. In this assessment, modernization was equated with westernization. The greatest impetus for this theory came from W.W. Rostow in his 1960 book *The Stages of Economic Growth*.<sup>7</sup> Rostow

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<sup>5</sup> Mannon, Susan K. Lecture material SOC 4730, Utah State University, January 7, 2004.

<sup>6</sup> Although the term "Third World" is generally associated with the Cold War, it is still often used referring to less developed countries. There is much debate about the implications of using such terms. The author recognizes the potential problems therein. However, for the purposes of this paper, Third World, underdeveloped, less developed, and developing may be used interchangeably.

<sup>7</sup> Rostow, WW. *The Stages of Economic Growth*. University Press, Cambridge, England. 1960

outlined the idea that all countries move along a predetermined course from traditional societies to modern societies. He argued that those countries that are less developed are just behind on the spectrum and have the ability to ultimately achieve modernization. Supporters of this theory assert that if countries are at a 'lower' stage, it is due to internal problems. In this line of thought, such problems can be remedied by enforcing capitalism and free trade with those societies already at a 'higher' stage.

The Bretton Woods institutions established years earlier were aptly suited to follow these guidelines. The hope was that the developed countries would benefit from this trade, and world prosperity would increase, thereby expanding the global pie for everyone. However, many would argue that this has not been the case—that developing countries simply get smaller and smaller portions of the proverbial pie. Further criticisms of Modernization theory contend that it “blames the victim for the crime.” In addition, many people criticize the ethnocentric equation of modernization with westernization. Such criticisms have led to the formation of new development theories.

#### *Dependency Theory:*

In the 1960's, theorists in Latin American intellectual circles denounced Modernization theory. These emerging theorists argued that the “backwardness” of poor countries was not created by internal problems, but was actually the fault of outside powers. Dependency theorists, as they came to be known, believed that the underdevelopment of countries was a result of exploitation by developed countries. Through unfair relationships of trade and power, the developing world was kept dependent on the developed, industrialized world.

Dependency theory did not look at the world as a spectrum from traditional to modern. Instead, it said that tradition and modernity were simply different positions in the same global economy. One Dependency theorist, Andre Gunder Frank, in his 1966 book *The Development of Underdevelopment*<sup>8</sup> divided the world into the core countries and the peripheral countries. He said that the core exploits the periphery through unfair trade relationships. As long as these relationships continue, he maintained, the periphery will never be able to develop economically. Dependency theorists therefore describe a sort of neo-imperialism or economic imperialism practiced by the major powers towards the less developed countries.

Another theorist from this school, Fernando Cardoso, wrote a book in 1979 called *Dependency and Development in Latin America*<sup>9</sup> in which he fine-tuned the theory. He introduced the idea of situations of dependency. He agreed with the basic assumption that the metropole (core) exploits the satellites (periphery), but he argued that it is allowed to do so for different reasons and has many different forms depending on the countries involved.

#### *World Systems Theory:*

The Dependency theorists had begun what is sometimes referred to as the radical political economy approach to understanding development. In the 1970's, another theory joined its ranks. This theory, known as World Systems theory, was first proposed by

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<sup>8</sup> Frank, AG. *The Development of Underdevelopment*. Bethany Books, Stockholm, Sweden. 1966

<sup>9</sup> Cardoso, F. Faletto, E. *Dependency and Development in Latin America*. University of California Press, Berkeley. 1979. Translated by M.M. Urquidi.



Immanuel Wallerstein. He wrote two books *The Modern World System* (1976)<sup>10</sup> and *The Capitalist World Economy* (1979)<sup>11</sup> in which he took what he labeled a more global view of development. He acknowledged the Dependency theorists' assertion that there was one world economy, but he divided it into several different cultural systems.

World Systems theorists also differed from Dependency theorists in the addition of a third piece of the puzzle—the semi-periphery. World Systems theorists recognize the existence of a gray area between the core and the periphery. These semi-peripheral countries are allowed to prosper just enough that the system is legitimized to the poorer peripheral countries. The theory is that the periphery views the slightly better condition of the semi-periphery and believes they can improve their own situation. This offers stability to the system, because the periphery doesn't revolt against it. This also means, in World Systems theory, that the only way to change the system is structurally. Many people consider World Systems theory sophisticated Dependency theory because of their many similarities. In fact, many former Dependency theorists would consider themselves World Systems theorists. Because of this, many discussions of development theory do not separate the two. Therefore, in the discussion of policies and progress that follows, they will likewise be combined under the Dependency heading.

## **Policies and progress**

### *Modernization:*

The most notable influence of Modernization theory was an increase in international awareness of the Development Project. Modernization theory opened the

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<sup>10</sup> Wallerstein, I. *The Modern World System*. New York Academic Press, New York. 1976

<sup>11</sup> Wallerstein, I. *The Capitalist World Economy*. Cambridge University Press, New York. 1979

door for further study of and aid to developing countries. The decade from 1961-1970 was declared the First Development Decade by the United Nations. During this time, the major powers were charge with focusing on issues of development; they also held several conferences on the topic designed to create programs or models for the developing countries. Most of these programs were directed by the idea that through imposing a western economic model on Third World countries, they would be able to modernize.

This western model of development was epitomized in the Development Project and the Bretton Woods institutions. The World Bank and the International Monetary Fund have been notorious for giving assistance with “strings attached.” In other words, these institutions would only agree to aid a country if that country met certain conditions. Some such conditions were understandable given the goals of the countries running these institutions: efforts towards democracy and capitalism, no human rights abuses, etc. However, the extent to which the IMF and World Bank expected developing countries to follow their “guidelines” was unreasonable. Most of these countries were in periods of transition in government, were suffering from internal ethnic conflict, or had incredible amounts of poverty and displaced people. Such conditions made it difficult for their governments to accomplish the goals the western powers demanded.

Not only was it difficult to attain and maintain development assistance, the aid itself was greatly flawed. Since Modernization theory guided most development programs at this time, assistance was not created around the specific needs of a group of people. Instead, it drew from the idea that the western model would work for everyone. In the 1980’s, the major powers sought to impose Structural Adjustment Policies (SAPs) in developing countries. The SAPs were “a series of reforms, often drastic and radical, to

increase economic growth and ameliorate balance-of-payments difficulties.”<sup>12</sup> The hope seems simple enough—to earn money and limit spending. However, these policies had devastating effects on the populations of developing countries. In order to promote exports, the poor states essentially turned economic control over to private investors, foreign countries, and multinational corporations. They had to deregulate the economy, leaving enormous populations of poverty-stricken people without the one safety net they had previously possessed—the state.

As the globalization era began, there was a greater demand for foreign investment, and a willing supply of multinational corporations to go into the developing countries, because they offered a tax-free location with cheap labor. Although ideally this would have brought prosperity to the host countries, in actuality, the money never remained there. Instead, profits went to the already developed and prosperous home countries of the MNCs. This system created a new dependence on the developed world and a new class of poverty in the developing countries.

The effects this has had on women are tremendous. “The combined effect of the rising cost of living, particularly rising food prices, and decreased health care is that malnutrition as well as mortality...is on the rise.”<sup>13</sup> To combat these problems, women in developing countries are employing new “survival strategies.” Women are being forced into the labor force in great numbers because of increased unemployment among men. As overall household income drops, women must seek employment for the survival of

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<sup>12</sup> Scott, CV. *Gender and Development: Rethinking Modernization and Dependency Theory*. Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc. Boulder, Colorado, 1995.

<sup>13</sup> Deere, CD, Safa, H, Antrobus, P. “Impact of the Economic Crisis on Poor Women and their Households” *In the Shadows of the Sun: Caribbean Development Alternatives and US Policy*. Westview Press. Boulder, Colorado. 1990. Found in *The Women, Gender, and Development Reader*. Edited by Visvanathan, Duggan, Nisonoff, and Wieggersma. ZED Books LTD. London and New Jersey, 1997.

their family. Although many find work in the formal sector, mainly in export factories, a high percentage must make a living in the informal sector, which can involve activities from selling homemade products and foodstuffs to prostitution.<sup>14</sup> The working conditions in both sectors are horrendous: low wages, long hours, unhealthy workspaces, and various human rights abuses. In addition, most women also retain their domestic responsibilities over home and children.

*Dependency:*

Dependency theorists have very different solutions for these challenges than Modernization theorists. Unfortunately, because those with money and power typically fall under the latter categorization, Dependency theorists have not had many occasions to implement their plans. This is not to say, however, that they have not made progress. The first major influence of these theorists came about in 1974 with the formation of the Group of 77. This was done in response to the Group of 7, as the major powers of the world system were known. In 1974, 77 underdeveloped, primarily southern, countries decided to join forces and work towards creating a New International Economic Order (NIEO). They began to have a greater voice in many international decisions.

However, as implied earlier, because they did not control the money, they could not make final decisions in intergovernmental development programs. Development projects continued to be operated greatly on the basis of Modernization principles, insofar as they were operated under the auspices of organizations such as the World Bank and IMF. Today, this is often still the case in such organizations. Fortunately, progress is being made and several new organizations have become more noticeable in development

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<sup>14</sup> Nisonoff, L. "Introduction to Part Three" of *The WGD Reader*. 1997

assistance. These groups, primarily NGOs and UN organizations, are promoting programs that focus on issues such as education and women's rights. In fact, the effectiveness of focusing on women's issues has its own body of research and theory.

### **Theories of women in development**

#### *Women in Development:*

This perspective, known as WID, was the first development theory to focus on the role of women in international development issues. Even during the First Development Decade, there was little recognition that women needed specific attention. Fortunately, in 1962, the UN Women's Commission asked Ester Boserup, a Danish economist, to examine the role of women in development. Her findings culminated in her book *Woman's Role in Economic Development*, published in 1970.<sup>15</sup> This marked the birth of the WID perspective and ignited the movement for reform in the development project. In her study, Boserup found that the development programs being used during that time either excluded women entirely or undermined their role. She introduced several key claims concerning the unbalanced share of benefits to women, which would become the main arguments of WID theory.

These arguments are threefold: that women do not have equal access to the benefits and resources of development assistance, that development programs overlook women, "to the detriment of the effective impact they seek," and that aid agencies need to "recognize and overcome the inbuilt mechanisms constituting gender blindness."<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Boserup, E. *Woman's Role in Economic Development*. Allen & Unwin, London. 1970

<sup>16</sup> Von Braunmuhl, C. "Mainstreaming Gender – a Critical Revision" *Common Ground or Mutual Exclusion? Women's Movements and International Relations*. Edited by Marianne Braig and Sonja Wolte. Zed Books, Ltd. New York, NY. 2002.

Briefly, WID theorists argued that women were not getting their share of the benefits of Modernization programs. At this point, people had not questioned the merits of this theory and its policies. Whether the programs were working effectively at all was not at issue, simply whether they were benefiting women.

Thus, the WID perspective has the same limitations of Modernization theory in that many consider it ethnocentric, and blindly accepting of the cure-all principles of “free” trade and capitalism. In addition, critics of WID note that this perspective only examines economic efficiency and ignores the basic problem of inequality.

*Women and Development:*

Because of the limitations inherent in WID, theorists began looking for a new perspective on women’s development issues. In the late 1970’s, as Dependency theory was rising in development circles, the Women and Development perspective was established. The first adherents to this perspective were largely Marxist-Feminists who looked at the potential for structural change. WAD theorists held that in order to improve development, the whole system needs to be examined and, subsequently, changed. Some prominent theorists, such as Lourdes Beneria and Gita Sen, have called for a “radical transformation of society.” As these theorists stated in a 1981 article, “the contradictions of class and capital accumulation in the countryside can be resolved only through systematic social change.”<sup>17</sup>

WAD theorists were also the first to really examine the sexual division of labor or the Productive/Reproductive Divide. They demanded that development programs look at

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<sup>17</sup> Beneria, L. Sen, G. “Accumulation, Reproduction and Woman’s Role in Economic Development: Boserup Revisited.” *Signs*. Vol. VIII, No. 2. Winter, 1981. Found in *The WGD Reader*. 1997

the differences and divisions between male and female work. Unfortunately for the fate of this perspective, theorists did not describe how to remedy the problems they expected to find. The Women and Development perspective never moved farther than a vague vision of social change without specific recommendations to achieve it.

*Gender and Development:*

In the mid-1980's, theorists departed from the imprecise concept of WAD and formed a new theory, Gender and Development. As with WAD, GAD theorists generally followed Dependency and World Systems theory in challenging current development programs. However, unlike WAD, they did not look solely at women in development programs. In fact, they argued that to really understand development, one had to examine both genders and the relationships between them. This did include acknowledging male responsibility for many existing conditions, but not necessarily blame.

Along these same lines, GAD theorists looked at the connections between the productive and reproductive spheres made more visible by WAD theory, rather than just their disparities. Perhaps the most significant deviation from WAD, however, was that GAD theorists identified a plan of action. These theorists specified both long-term and short-term goals. The long-term goal was similar to that defined by earlier theorists of a dramatic social transformation. However, proponents of GAD did not believe this could be achieved immediately. They promoted short-term means to achieve it. Kate Young embellished this idea with the term "transformatory potential."<sup>18</sup> This referred to meeting practical needs (short-term) as a vehicle to enable the pursuit of strategic needs (long-

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<sup>18</sup> Young, K. "Gender and Development." *Gender and Development Reader*. Ottawa, Canadian Council for International Cooperation. 1992. Found in *The Women Gender and Development Reader*. 1997.

term). In other words, if women are aided with immediate, material needs, they will be better able to promote and create social change or a radical transformation.

*Women, Environment, and Development:*

Although WID and GAD are considered the most prominent perspectives on women in international development, several alternatives have recently been proposed. The Women, Environment, and Development perspective (WED) was created by Ecofeminists. Ecofeminism is a study that connects the male exploitation of women with the male exploitation of the environment. WED theorists argue that current Western development models have three major problems: they are male dominated and therefore devalue women; they are ethnocentric and so devalue indigenous knowledge systems; and they are environmentally damaging and therefore devalue nature.<sup>19</sup>

The major proponent of this perspective, Vandana Shiva, coined the term “maldevelopment” for this flawed western model. She maintains that this maldevelopment can be countered with the “Feminine Principle” or the idea that women have an innate cooperation and harmony with nature, a harmony that Third World women are in a privileged position to access.<sup>20</sup> Shiva suggests that by getting back to nature and ending male exploitation of both women and the environment, countries will be able to develop in a more desirable manner.

Although this perspective is gaining more voice in certain circles, there are several criticisms of this perspective. Many people do not want to see a return to subsistence agriculture, as WED theory seems to imply. In addition, WED assumes that

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<sup>19</sup> Mannon, Susan K. Lecture material SOC 4730, Utah State University, January 16, 2004.

<sup>20</sup> Shiva, V. “Women in Nature.” *Staying Alive*. Zed Books, London. 1989. Found in *The Women, Gender, and Development Reader*. 1997.



all women have an innate connection with nature. This assumption faces tremendous challenges, particularly from women themselves. However, the relationship between the exploitation of the environment and women's progress is under further study. Programs that include environmental considerations as well as women's issues in their planning may prove to be more effective than those which do not.

*Third World Feminist Perspective:*

The Third World Feminist Perspective originated with women in developing countries who were frustrated with having wealthier, more educated women from the developed world speak for them. Their basic assertion is that Third World women must be able to speak for themselves and have their own voices heard. These theorists argue that not all women experience inequality in the same way. They criticize Western Feminist models for depicting them as ignorant, for drawing on stereotypes, and for believing that all women have the same needs.

Chandra Mohanty is one such theorist who has strongly insisted that there is no over-arching, unifying category of women.<sup>21</sup> She has championed the idea that development planners need to consider the women of the specific area they are targeting and create programs that are directed at their own specific needs and goals. Mohanty and others have propelled a movement for self-representation and self-empowerment that is embodied in new organizations such as DAWN (Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era). Although the Third World Feminist Perspective is relatively new, its

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<sup>21</sup> Mohanty, C. "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses." *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism*. Indiana University Press, Bloomington. 1991. Found in *WGD Reader*.

visibility has already grown in international development circles and could potentially gain even greater influence.<sup>22</sup>

### **Policies and progress**

#### *Women in Development:*

The work of Ester Boserup is easily the most well known and influential body of research on women in international development. Her efforts opened the door for further study of women's issues and gained international recognition for this study. Because of her groundbreaking work, mainstream Development agencies began to accept the value of including women in their programs. Statistics began to be gathered in consideration of gender—a truly revolutionary phenomenon that now seems commonplace. Women also gained more visibility in development planning. In addition to laying the foundations for this field, programs using WID concepts showed measurable improvements in the life expectancy and education levels of women in the developing world. Women's average life expectancy in developing countries increased from 53.7 years in 1970 to 62.9 years in 1992. Female enrollment in public education likewise increased from 38% to 68%.<sup>23</sup>

The impact of WID theory culminated in the UN International Women's Decade (1976-1985). This was the first official acknowledgement by the international community of the importance of women's issues. In addition, since that time, there have been four major conferences on women in development: Mexico City 1975, Copenhagen 1980, Nairobi 1985, and Beijing 1995. Each of these focused on women's roles in

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<sup>22</sup> Mannon, Susan K. Utah State University professor. Organization for development theory discussion and direction to sources guided by class lectures Jan., 2004 in Sociology 4730, taken Spring semester 2004.

<sup>23</sup> Mannon, Susan K. Lecture material SOC 4730, Utah State University, January 14, 2004.

development programs and specific ways to improve those plans. They also had a symbolic importance in that they legitimized the issue of women in development to national leaders. By attending or not attending these conferences, leaders were forced to take a stance on these issues. To be considered an interest in governmental decisions was an incredibly significant step for the study of women in development.<sup>24</sup>

*Women and Development:*

As discussed earlier, the WAD perspective is vague in its vision and therefore has not initiated many policies for improvement. The most influential progress WAD theorists can claim is in issuing a call for radical transformation. They increased awareness of the underlying social and structural problems contributing to gender inequality and development. In addition, by introducing the discussion of the sexual division of labor, they enabled others to study this divide in more detail.

*Gender and Development:*

Because of the relatively recent arrival of the GAD perspective to the discussion of women in international development, there have not been many policies enacted on its guidelines. However, this is beginning to change. As greater numbers of people adhere to Dependency theory, there comes greater acceptance of the Gender and Development perspective. As people begin to see the ineffectiveness of development programs based on theories such as Modernization or WID, they turn to different explanations and recommendations. Development planners are starting to take a closer look at gender relations and the reproductive sphere. Even the World Bank has improved in its

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<sup>24</sup> Von Braunmuhl, C. "Mainstreaming Gender – a Critical Revision" *Common Ground or Mutual Exclusion? Women's Movements and International Relations*. 2002.

recognition of gender issues. Between 1988 and 1991, most of the 615 projects approved by the World Bank included a “gender dimension.”<sup>25</sup> The Bank seems to have realized that “the economic and social return on educating the female population is high,” as they assert in a 1993 World Bank publication.<sup>26</sup> In addition, many people now recognize that in order to achieve social change, immediate needs must first be addressed. Kate Young’s proposal of “transformatory potential” is gaining more adherents in theoretical and policy-making circles.

*Alternatives:*

The most important progress of the alternative theories is a greater voice for women in the developing countries themselves. Their influence has increased as more opportunities for education and foreign language learning have been made available to these women. In addition, the appearance of new literary genres, such as the testimonio, has increased the importance of individual historical accounts. Many women have made a name for themselves, including Rigoberta Menchú<sup>27</sup> and María de los Reyes Castillo Bueno (known as Reyita), as voices for their oppressed peoples.<sup>28</sup> These are prime examples of Third World women gaining recognition for their own voices.

Currently, programs run by organizations such as the United Nations Development Programme and various NGOs such as FEMNET and the Global Fund for Women are attempting to draw more from indigenous knowledge in development

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<sup>25</sup> Bessis, S. “The World Bank and Women: ‘Instrumental Feminism’” *Eye to Eye: Women Practicing Development across Cultures*. Edited by Susan Perry and Celeste Schenk. Zed Books, Ltd. London, 2001.

<sup>26</sup> Herz, B., Subbarao et al. *Let the Girls Learn*, summary document 133F. Washington DC, USA. The World Bank. 1993.

<sup>27</sup> Menchu, R. *I, Rigoberta Menchu: An Indian woman in Guatemala*. Edited and Introduced by Elisabeth Burgos-Debray. Translated by Ann Wright. Published by Verso. London, UK. 1983.

<sup>28</sup> Bueno, M. *Reyita: The life of a Black Cuban woman in the twentieth century*. As told to her daughter, Daisy Rubiera Castillo. Translated by Anne McLean. Duke University Press, Durham. 2000.

planning and support local women's organizations in the developing world. New efforts to regulate MNCs through international organizations have also included measures to utilize local knowledge systems, authority and the resources of women. The following section provides a more detailed discussion of these improvements as well as challenges to their implementation.

### **Current Reforms**

As discussed earlier, until recently, nearly all development programs were guided by the capitalist paradigm. In these programs, there has been staggered and limited success. What is the explanation for these shortcomings? Misdirected funds and misplaced authority is frequently the answer. Money never remained in the hands of those in need, and the program coordinators rarely gave deference to local authority. Another explanation is that these programs largely ignored the role of women in development. As development projects have incorporated a focus on women in their planning, they have witnessed tangible and intangible benefits. This is often attributed to the fact that women in developing nations are responsible for overseeing family health and diet. Therefore, they directly implement knowledge they may acquire about nutrition, sanitation, health care, etc.<sup>29</sup>

### *Progress*

One of the major factors in the progress of new development projects has been the emergence of several non-governmental organizations, or NGOs. These groups seek to

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<sup>29</sup> "Equality, Equity and the Empowerment of Women" from the Communications Consortium of the World Population Awareness Organization. Found: <http://www.overpopulation.org/dignity.html#footnote>

provide development assistance without the restrictions characteristic of the World Bank and IMF. In addition, several of these NGOs acknowledge the importance of utilizing women and indigenous knowledge in development projects. One area in which NGOs have been particularly visible is in combating unfair labor practices imposed by multinational corporations. The Maquila Solidarity Network is a Canadian based group that seeks to promote fair wages and working conditions in factories of multinational corporations.<sup>30</sup> This network collaborates with groups in Mexico, Central America, and Asia to promote solidarity and help with organizing in maquiladora factories and export processing zones. The strength of this organization lies in its ability to build solidarity with grassroots movements in the developing countries and lobby for public and governmental support in the developed countries.

There are also several organizations that specifically target women's issues in development. The official website for the Women in Development Network contains an extensive list of such women's organizations, including several based in the developing countries themselves. FEMNET (African Women Development and Communication Network) is one such organization based in Nairobi, Kenya. This particular group was established in 1988 "to share information, experiences, ideas and strategies among African women's non-governmental organizations."<sup>31</sup> The goal of FEMNET is to strengthen the contribution of African NGOs to women's issues in development, human rights, and equality.

Another strength of these NGOs is their ability to employ the policy prescriptions of the radical political economy approaches. As discussed earlier, Dependency theorists

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<sup>30</sup> Maquila Solidarity Network website: [www.maquilasolidarity.org](http://www.maquilasolidarity.org)

<sup>31</sup> WIDNET website, list of organizations: <http://www.focusintl.com/listdi.htm>

and Gender and Development theorists promote an agenda that utilizes indigenous knowledge of the developing communities, increases cooperation among groups, and focuses on the role of women. NGOs have a unique capability to focus on specific problems without being held accountable to the interests of a larger party. NGOs are typically organized to focus on one specific issue or area. Ideally, they do not promote hidden agendas or spread themselves too thin in their efforts. Because of this, on the small scale, NGOs are more effective than state-run organizations.

Bilateral assistance programs are often criticized for the same flaws inherent in the Bretton Woods institutions: restrictive conditions and unattainable demands. Although many bilateral programs now acknowledge the importance of working with women and grassroots movements, underlying agendas limit their ability to use the knowledge available to them. However, not all development projects funded by states are ineffective. Projects initiated by Intergovernmental Organizations have played a significant role in international development and women's programs. The most visible IGO, the United Nations, has indeed promoted an active development agenda and has worked towards greater cooperation on women's issues. Development projects of the UN are run through the United Nations Development Programme and its branches. Traditionally, the UN is recognized for its effectiveness and consistency in providing aid and development assistance. This may be attributed to the fact that the UN does not subscribe to the ideas of modernization theory.

The UN also led the largest effort to promote international consensus on and commitment to women's rights. This effort culminated in the first international committee designed expressly for this purpose in 1979. The committee, known as

CEDAW, or the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, sought to establish internationally agreed measures to combat human rights violations against women. In 1995, the UN General Assembly officially adopted DEDAW, or the Declaration on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women. Of the 198 members of the General Assembly, 147 states ratified the declaration.<sup>32</sup> Notable abstentions were the United States, India, and all “official” Islamic states.

Considering the progress that has been made in organizing new development projects, the low visibility of these efforts must be attributed to certain constraints on these policies. This opens our discussion of the limitations of the radical political economy approach as well as an explanation of why there have been so many problems in its implementation.

#### *Limitations*

One of the biggest setbacks for such approaches is that their vision is less definable than that of the capitalist paradigm. The latter has goals that are easier to distinguish from a foreign standpoint—provisions for free trade and capitalism. Radical political economy approaches, however, have goals such as establishing infrastructure, education, accountable governments, and increased quality of life that are harder to measure in strict economic models. Because these visions are more ambiguous, people are less inclined to support them, particularly with their money. If those with the means can't see the benefit of helping those without, nothing will get done.

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<sup>32</sup> *The Work of CEDAW: Reports of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women*. Volume IV 1989. United Nations Publication, New York, 1997.



This is also why the capitalist paradigm has traditionally been well supported in the western world. First, people see their own economic models as the absolute means to promoting development. Despite evidence to the contrary, many people believe the developing world will “catch up” if guided by the enlightened principles of developed countries. Programs that challenge this assumption are not well-received, nor well-funded. Even in the earlier discussion of progress in World Bank development projects, only 9.1 percent of its financial obligations went to projects that included a “gender dimension.”<sup>33</sup> Second, multinational corporations in developing countries are the players getting the most benefit from free trade and international cooperation. Because these companies are based in the developed world, all their profits flow back into their already prosperous home countries. For many such companies, outsourcing of labor has become an integral part of their financial dominance. Neither the companies nor the policy makers that represent their interests are inclined to change the system.

Not only are radical political economy approaches limited by an unquestioned adherence to the capitalist paradigm, they also face logistical challenges to their implementation. One major challenge concerns placement of authority. Participants would have to decide who is best to direct development projects. This reveals issues of financial control, base power, and competent leadership. Legitimately, those who provide the funds demand that they regulate their use. However, the money holders are not always the wisest spenders. Conditions in the developing world have shown time and again that the most effective programs are those that draw upon local knowledge bases, particularly those that originate at this grassroots level. Although in many cases, the

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<sup>33</sup> Bessis, S. “The World Bank and Women: ‘Instrumental Feminism’” *Eye to Eye: Women Practicing Development across Cultures*. Edited by Susan Perry and Celeste Schenk. Zed Books, Ltd. London, 2001.

people in the developing countries know what they need to achieve their goals and simply lack the means to obtain it, they are rarely given the opportunity to do so. Both effective regulation and the competent distribution of funds then fall victim to power struggles and lack of cooperation.

This lack of cooperation is a fundamental problem with the implementation of new development projects. Governmental organizations battle non-governmental organizations for influence while the people themselves battle for the means to improve their own lives. This struggle can often be seen when countries rebuild after the devastation of war, as has been the case in Afghanistan since 2001. The country was quickly overrun by dozens of NGOs that faced serious challenges in becoming “fully operational” because of minimal staff, financial backing, and access to knowledge and opportunities. Compounding the problem is the issue of donor coordination, assuring the effectiveness and transparency of aid. The Development Gateway, an NGO formerly incubated by the World Bank, gives the following assessment:

“The donor community is very fragmented; aid coordination is inadequate despite initial efforts to coordinate effectively, including through the use of information technology. Because there are so many players involved and competing in many areas and there is a limited local capacity to absorb and manage aid, there are still significant risks of wasteful duplication of donor-funded projects. Special efforts need to be made to prevent this potential problem or at least mitigate it.”<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> The Development Gateway Web Portal found at the following website:  
<http://www.developmentgateway.org/download/163273/oneyear.htm>

The case of Afghanistan is not without its successes, in refugee assistance and agricultural production, for example. However, the challenges of poverty and violence remain daunting, particularly for Afghan women. As the Human Rights Watch reported in 2002, "Many people outside the country believe that Afghan women and girls have had their rights restored. It's just not true. Women and girls are still being abused, harassed, and threatened all over Afghanistan, often by government troops and officials."<sup>35</sup> In addition, conditions of poverty affect much of the population, limiting access to basic sanitation and contributing to a life expectancy of only 46.97 years.<sup>36</sup>

These conditions of poverty, gender inequality and ineffective development initiatives are prevalent not only in states undergoing reconstruction, they are also found in many other target countries for development assistance. In order to overcome all of the above challenges to planning and implementing effective development programs, international actors must work towards a number of improvements. The following and final section contains recommendations for accomplishing these aims.

### *Suggestions for the Future*

Considering the great room for improvement in development projects, there are many possible suggestions to follow. One of the most promising ideas concerns the effects of multinational corporations on the developing world. As aforementioned, contrary to the belief that these businesses would bring money and development to impoverished countries, little capital has remained in the producing country. In addition,

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<sup>35</sup>Zama Coursen-Neff, Co-author of the report and counsel to the Children's Rights Division of Human Rights Watch. New York, December 17, 2002. found at <http://www.hrw.org/press/2002/12/herat1217.htm>

<sup>36</sup> CIA The World Factbook 2003. Found at <http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/af.html>

the employees of these export-zone industries are forced to work long hours, at low wages, and in terrible conditions. All other industries of the developing country suffer, and little is done by the MNCs to establish lasting development or to improve the quality of life of their employees.

To ameliorate these conditions, human rights activists and development theorists have proposed stricter regulation of MNCs and their factories. Several different means have been suggested to accomplish this: the Ethical Trading Initiative (ETI) in Britain, the Canadian Ethical Trading Action Group (ETAG), the Worker Rights Consortium (WRC), and the Social Accountability Initiative 8000 (SA 8000) are among the many proposals. All such plans promote measures to increase the accountability of MNCs by establishing international codes of conduct. These codes are generally based on human rights as asserted by the International Labor Organization and UN Declarations.

The SA 8000, for example, is a U.S.-based initiative that seeks to establish "a comprehensive global verification standard for auditing and certifying corporate responsibility." By allowing SAI auditors to certify their company, MNCs declare their commitment to maintain certain conditions in their factories, provide specific benefits to employees, and contribute to the development of the respective country's infrastructure. The hope of international code initiatives is that governments, particularly the U.S., will provide incentives such as tax-cuts to companies that are "approved" or perhaps disincentives to those corporations who do not merit a certification. Ultimately, they hope developing countries themselves will only allow approved corporations to utilize their labor force.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Maquila Solidarity Network website: [www.maquilasolidarity.org](http://www.maquilasolidarity.org)

Along with improved regulation of multinational corporations, the workers need greater opportunity and support for organizing to improve their own situation. Obviously, organizations already exist and workers have unionized and demanded their rights before. However, in the current system, if an MNC faces too many challenges with the labor market in a particular country, it can move without obligation to another country offering an available workforce. In fact, companies may do so simply because another group of people are more desperate and will work for lower wages. To prevent this and to heighten the influence of worker's organizations, development projects should provide education and resources to organizers.

Such projects must also include a direct focus on women, for a variety of reasons. In 2000, of the 1.3 million people employed in 3,700 reported export production factories, approximately 60 percent were "female, young, unskilled and uneducated."<sup>38</sup> In addition, due to high male unemployment, many women in underdeveloped countries must fill the role of breadwinner. They must do so while earning lower wages for their work and still fulfilling household responsibilities. Because of their treatment in the labor force and the many roles they fill in society, women are good candidates for organization. The movements that women have originated or in which women have played a major part tend to be more precise in their demands, more effective in achieving them, and more enduring.

Another suggestion for improving development projects is to provide incentives for states to actually uphold international agreements. This would necessitate the honest

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<sup>38</sup> Chiang, L. "Maquiladoras in Latin America and China — The Interaction of Export Processing Zones on Women Workers in Asia and the Americas" Center for Latin American Studies, UC Berkeley. Presented by Juliana So and Garrett Brown November 21, 2003. Source found at: <http://ist-socrates.berkeley.edu:7001/Events/fall2003/11-21-03-so-brown/>

cooperation of the world's major power, the United States. Countries including the U.S. should uphold international commitments to give aid without insurmountable requirements and to focus on women's development issues. Countries who do not uphold these agreements should not be granted authority in development planning nor should they continue to dictate the implementation of development projects.

As noted in the case of Afghanistan, lack of cooperation among organizations in the developing world is a significant hindrance to development. NGOs, IGOs, and local authorities need to work more closely with one another from the earliest phases of project planning. In Africa, the previously mentioned organization FEMNET has the stated aim "to provide an infrastructure for and a channel through which...NGOs can reach one another and share information, experiences and strategies."<sup>39</sup> More organizations such as this one need to be supported to enable greater cooperation and integration of development planning and implementation.

New organizations have also discovered that women are vital to the success of these projects. As bases of domestic society, women often are the bearers of indigenous knowledge, the protectors of cultural traditions, and the decisive link to transmitting new knowledge and techniques to their societies. When these women are given greater access to education and development training, the quality of life for the entire society improves. The Development Gateway describes this influence as follows:

"Gender is an issue of development effectiveness, and mainstreaming it into the work of development agencies will allow it to achieve better results...Evidence demonstrates that when women and men are relatively

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<sup>39</sup> FEMNET website: <http://www.femnet.or.ke/about.asp>

equal, economies tend to grow faster, and the well-being of men, women and children is enhanced. Many multi-lateral development agencies recognize that development effectiveness can be enhanced by ensuring that gender perspectives and attention to the goal of gender equality are central to all their activities- policy development, research, dialogue, legislation, budgeting, and planning, implementation and monitoring of programs and projects.”<sup>40</sup>

Also included on The Development Gateway site is a list of development agencies and multi-lateral organizations that have recognized the role of women and are participating in the current “trend of gender mainstreaming.” Such groups encourage optimism among gender and development theorists, particularly those who have worked on development projects and testify to the importance of focusing on women. Scott Larsen, who has volunteered in Mexico on several development projects, contends that what developing countries need is more support from foreign sources for their own grassroots organizations, movements often led by women. He also notes that in order for projects to be successful, they must use the valuable influence of these women. In his words, “[the women] are the movers and the shakers.”<sup>41</sup>

A recent report of the World Bank, *Annex: The Policy Research Report on Gender and Development*, argues that by providing women equal rights with men and equal access to employment, education, and property, countries will see “...decreased child mortality, improved public health, a decline in population growth, and a strengthening of overall economic growth.”<sup>42</sup> If the World Bank and other development

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<sup>40</sup> The Development Gateway Web Portal found at the following website:

<http://www.developmentgateway.org/node/130625/>

<sup>41</sup> Scott Larsen, Volunteer for Desarrollo Comunitario Integral (DICOM) Aug-Dec 2002. Interview conducted March 15, 2004.

<sup>42</sup> The World Bank Gender and Development Group, from *Advancing Gender Equality: World Bank Action since Beijing*. Found at <http://www.worldbank.org/gender/beijing5/specialreport/annexes.pdf>

organizations recognize the need for gender-based initiatives, why then have such projects been so rare? The explanation, as is often the case, depends on the ever-present problem of funding.

The issue is aptly described in the title of a 2000 article by Siobhan Riordan: “‘Put your money where your mouth is!’ The need for public investment in women’s organizations.”<sup>43</sup> In this article, the author argues that even in circumstances where political rhetoric on women’s issues is abundant, the declared objectives are rarely matched by sufficient investment. On the topic of international development, Riordan references an assertion made by Carol Moser: “because the work which genuinely seeks to empower the powerless is potentially challenging to those in power, women’s organizations...remain largely unsupported both by national governments and bilateral aid agencies.” Riordan goes on to promote the idea of monitoring public investment to increase transparency in development agendas.

Other strategies have also been suggested to improve financing measures for development projects. Maria Floro identifies several recommendations for the implementation of a “gender-aware framework” in a presentation to the German Bundestag in February, 2002. She includes the aforementioned need for monitoring mechanisms and adds that there is a need for “gender-sensitive investment policies to ensure that gender equality is promoted and ensured in the mobilization of domestic as well as international resources.”<sup>44</sup> As the above analyses suggest, if women’s issues are

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<sup>43</sup> Riordan, S. “‘Put your money where your mouth is!’ The need for public investment in women’s organizations.” *Gender in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. Edited by Caroline Sweetman. Oxfam. Oxford, UK. 2000.

<sup>44</sup> Floro, M. *Gender Perspectives on Financing for Development* Presented to the German Bundestag on Public Hearing of the Study Commission “Globalization of the World Economy – Challenges and Responses” Monday, February 18, 2002. Found March 22, 2004 at: [http://e-education.uni-muenster.de/enquete/papers/floro/weltto114\\_stell005.pdf](http://e-education.uni-muenster.de/enquete/papers/floro/weltto114_stell005.pdf).



to achieve their potential influence in the success of development programs, they must be given more voice in the allocation of funds and the distribution of development assistance as well as greater attention in monitoring these resources.

Promoting human rights over western profit, improving development funding, integrating organizations and projects, and, above all, recognizing the indispensable role of women in development will prove crucial to the success of development programs in the future. In her testimonial, Rigoberta Menchú refers to her mother's words in organizing the Guatemalan women. She states, "...any evolution, any change, in which women had not participated, would not be a change, and there would be no victory."<sup>45</sup> This is true for all countries and peoples seeking to improve their situation. Development projects will not witness their potential success unless policy-makers and implementers give women the opportunity to fully participate.

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<sup>45</sup> Menchu, R. I, *Rigoberta Menchu: An Indian woman in Guatemala*. Edited and Introduced by Elisabeth Burgos-Debray. Translated by Ann Wright. Published by Verso. London, UK. 1983.

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