

Topic 1: Ensuring Economic Equality for Men and Women

1. Introduction:

Studies suggest countries around the globe could raise their respective GDP levels if more women were given the chance to enter the labor market. This, however, will necessitate gender equality policy actions of one kind or another. Although the tools to be used may vary between the countries, there are certain common aspects that will be subject of discussion in the coming years. If women or men are discriminated against in terms of access to education, then the human capital of our society will not be nurtured. There are major inconsistencies in the levels of labor force involvement between women and men. This is to a great extent due to perceptions about the role of women in the interface between housework and work. Conventionally, women have been anticipated to perform most of the work in the home as a matter of course, irrespective of which partner is most suited to the task. This old-fashioned attitude still remains an important explanation of the differences in women's labor participation. It is a commonly known fact that women have lower pay levels than men, which directly reflects the differing conditions and environments under which women and men live. This applies to everything from the unequal sharing of household work, to pay discrimination of women in the labor market.

2. Definition of key terms:

Gender equality - is the state of equal ease of access to resources and opportunities regardless of gender, including economic participation and decision-making; and the state of valuing different behaviors, aspirations and needs equally, regardless of gender.

GDP - is a monetary measure of the market value of all final goods and services produced in a period (quarterly or yearly) of time. Nominal GDP estimates are commonly used to determine the economic performance of a whole country or region, and to make international comparisons.

GAD - the development perspective and process that is participatory and empowering, equitable, sustainable, free from violence, respectful of human rights, supportive of self-determination and actualization of human potentials.

3. Timeline of events:

The Evolution of 'Women in Development' to 'Gender and Development'

In the 1970s, research on African farmers noted that, far from being gender neutral, development was gender blind and could harm women. Out of this realization emerged the Women in Development (WID) approach, which constructed the problem of development as being women's exclusion from a benign process. Women's subordination was seen as having its roots in their exclusion from the market sphere and their limited access to, and control, over resources. The key was then to place women 'in' development by legislatively trying to limit discrimination and by promoting their involvement in education and employment.

The WID approach led to resources being targeted at women and made particularly women's significant productive or income generating contribution, more visible. Their reproductive contribution was less well emphasised. While WID advocated for greater gender equality, it did not tackle the real structural problem: the unequal gender roles and relations that are at the basis of gender subordination and women's exclusion. This approach also focussed on what have been termed practical gender needs, such as providing better access to water, which would reduce the amount of time women and girls must spend in domestic activities and thus allow them more time for education or employment. There was no questioning why collecting water has been constructed as a female responsibility, or why improved access to water is a need of women and girls only.

In the 1980s, the Gender and Development (GAD) approach arose out of the critique of WID. GAD recognised that gender roles and relations are key to improving women's lives, with the term 'gender' suggesting that a focus on both women and men is needed. More recently, the need to understand how gender intersects with other characteristics such as age, ethnicity and sexuality has been noted. The GAD approach recognises that it is not sufficient to add women and girls into existing processes of development but there is also a need to problematise why they are excluded, advocating that the focus should be on addressing the imbalances of power at the basis of that exclusion. GAD also questions the notion of 'development' and its benign nature, implying a need to shift from a narrow understanding of development as economic growth, to a more social or human centred development. GAD projects are more holistic and seek to address women's strategic gender interests by seeking the elimination of institutionalised forms of discrimination for instance around land rights, or ensuring the right of women and girls to live free from violence, for example (Molyneux 1985; Moser 1989).

The 1990s witnessed the 'rise of rights' as many NGOs and agencies adopted a rights-based

approach to development. Rights increase the recognition that women's demands are legitimate claims. The most notable success for the women's movement has perhaps been the establishment of sexual and reproductive rights as such. Within this has been recognition of women's right to live free from violence, and a broadening of understanding of violence against women from 'domestic' to 'gender based'. There was also a shift in understanding development as meaning economic development to a more holistic social development focus, yet economic growth remains the main driver.

For the majority of large development organisations and agencies, the WID approach has now largely been replaced by GAD, which has been institutionalised within the notion of gender mainstreaming. Mainstreaming involves ensuring that a gendered perspective is central to all activities, including planning, implementation and monitoring of all programmes, projects, and legislation. While critiqued if undertaken merely as a 'tick box' exercise, gender mainstreaming offers a potential for placing gender at the heart of development. However, women's 'rights', particularly sexual and reproductive health rights, are not universally accepted as rights, and violence against women remains prevalent across the globe, and women still lack full and equal participation in economic and political life. Mainstreaming has yet to succeed and there is a need for a continued prioritisation of integrating women into development.

4. Major parties involved: [picture.jpeg]

5. Possible solutions:

1. Rethink job interviews. The question: "What do you think your salary should be?" should be abolished altogether, as women consistently ask for less than men. Instead, interviewers should provide a fair and transparent salary range and ask applicants to position themselves within it.

2. Make gender equality part of training and education. Young people should be supported in choosing jobs that are future-oriented and promising, regardless of their gender.

3. Be proactive about welcoming women. Companies should clearly state that they want to hire, support and promote women. Salaries and promotions should be monitored and evaluated on a regular basis to ensure equal treatment.

4. Make flexibility and work-life balance a part of the wider company culture. Too often, employees have to specifically ask to work part-time or work from home, which can be awkward. Companies should instead offer a broad range of different options.

5. Don't limit your talent pool. Companies should aim for a 50-50 gender split in all their teams – right up to the executive floor. Offering practical support such as childcare, is part of this, as is the right attitude. It should not be a career killer for a man to ask for extended leave because he wants to look after his children.

6. Use the power of networking. Networking, mentoring and coaching opportunities can help women build confidence and develop their careers.

6. Bibliography:

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