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**Engendering embeddedness  
of economy in society and culture**

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## **Engendering embeddedness of economy in society and culture**

### **1 Introduction<sup>1</sup>**

The object of this paper is to ask where we are with regard to including gender in development co-operation, policy and theory. The thesis is put forward that rather fundamental changes have occurred in the last decade with regard to transformations going on in "developing countries" and concepts of development policy and co-operation as regards the inclusion of social science and societal and cultural issues. It is argued that gender planning and analysis has been the first perspective to open this avenue; however, when considering most recent "soft" concepts, gender is not included, either as an analytical tool or as a consistent dimension of overall policy formulation. In this regard, empirical examples will be taken from my own research in Cameroon and Senegal. In general I believe that development theory should no longer look at "projects" in isolation but rather include contextualisation in evaluations and make programmes and policies as such the object of analysis.

This can be proposed with regard to concepts such as participation, good governance, structural adjustment, and expansion of the market economy, decentralisation and democratisation, as well as capacity building and civil society. It is contended, however, that these concepts, which indeed raise issues of societal and cultural transformation, only use gender in the sense of excluded, poverty-stricken and vulnerable groups, instead of analysing the gender order of society and economy which structures agency, the economy and institutions.

It seems appropriate to build on different approaches which attempt to overcome this analytical and political deficit, such as approaches which link concepts of good governance and poverty to that of gender (Goetz, O'Brien 1995) and conceive economy as a gendered structure (Elson 1995), etc. Thereby a relational approach would be practised and concepts of new economic sociology and institutional economics be used, thus 'engendering' the development theory informing development co-operation.

It is suggested that this aim be pursued by 'engendering' the concept of embeddedness (Granovetter 1985), with economy, poverty, decentralisation and democratisation as well as civil society being the main areas. In this way, I believe, the opposition of equality versus efficiency can be overcome.

This means that we should abandon "impact analysis" and treating women as "vulnerable" groups, and instead analyse interaction and the structural embeddedness of economy and the construction of gender images in institutions (Goetz 1995), adopting a relational and dynamic planning approach (Kabeer 1994). Thereby the interaction of subsistence and market economy needs to be studied with great thoroughness, looking at female economy as one field of agency interacting with others. This

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corresponds to the call of critical macro economists apropos the relationship between the reproductive economy and the productive sector. It would be possible to develop a counter model to the instrumentalising potential approach, by using concepts such as sustainable development (Harcourt 1994, and others) with regard to markets assuring livelihoods, the necessities of subsistence economy, markets which are sometimes segregated by gender and region, entitlements and institutions related to economic resources such as land, as well as forms of organisation of market actors. This would mean overcoming the old distinctions between formal and informal sector, the upgrading of typically female economic fields, and a realistic consideration of opportunities and possibilities of liberalisation and reduction of bureaucratic and authoritarian modes of state governance and patrimonial structures of clientelism and privileges.

In order to look at the gendered structure of economy and its embeddedness, I suggest using an analytical approach focusing on the structuration of markets and the relationship between the reproductive/ subsistence/ informal sector and the formal economy, showing that the economic relationships of women and their institutional economic rights as well as gendered modes of accumulation (co-operation) are not taken into account in development co-operation, even though economic activities are supported.

NGOs often are seen to represent civil society and social science, thereby avoiding basic debates on different state sector policies (such as environmental ones), and participation becomes a populist concept excluding women, especially when formal decentralised structures including "traditional" ones are introduced or "reinvented". With regard to civil society, in the sense of exercising control over the state, ascertaining the social embeddedness of the market etc., I would go so far as to assert that women are much less involved in the entanglement between state and economy, i.e. in the predatory as well as the patrimonial state having to distribute mechanisms of enrichment within the economy, and constituting patron-client relations as the current form of articulation also as regards development resources. However, in some cases women's projects are used as the last strategic resource of the former development state to get some money distributed. The well-meant call for good governance does not look into these structuring mechanisms.

## **2 Approaches to women and economy**

### **Counteracting instrumentalisation through "efficiency approach"**

Such an approach would be a means of counteracting the danger of instrumentalising women's potential. The World Bank has, after having brought to light the "invisible woman", unfortunately contributed to the opposition between a social and an economic approach. The German Ministry of Economic Co-operation and Development for example would without hesitation consider family planning-programmes an integral part of women's promotion; on the other hand the argumentation always refers to using of women's potential for growth, which I would call instrumentalisation leading to blindness in many relational issues. The World Bank (1994) in its publication "enhancing the economic role of women in development" stressed "the need to improve economic opportunities for women ..., in order to promote faster and sustainable economic growth and efficiency ..., and smoother

adjustment to major policy changes." It was also recognised that deliberate efforts to address women's needs would "contribute to poverty alleviation, to protection of the environment, and to improvement of child welfare". Does this mean women are not supposed to advance in their own right? Does the 1994 WB publication on "enhancing women's participation in economic development" mean that the unequal gender distribution of work is going to be perpetuated? I cannot see any empowerment, no change of gender relations, to be understood as societal order and institutional construction. It is stated that instead of treating "women as a special target group of beneficiaries .. the ways in which the relations between women and men constrain or advance efforts to boost growth and reduce poverty" are now being addressed in a "gender and development approach". The goal is to "advance women's status and participation in economic development" (p. 12 f.). It is argued that "it is cost-effective to avoid female illness and death", and that "there are obvious payoffs to increasing the human capital of women farmers" (p. 24).

This instrumentalisation is rightly criticised by Naila Kabeer (1994) with reference to its using the argument of the economic potential of women as an instrument for growth, without looking at all at reproductive areas. I think that what has been argued - i.e. that women should go into more 'efficient' sectors of the economy - is cynical. It should not be 'either or'; rather, there is a need for structural changes in the economy and working conditions, creating 'female spheres' or spaces in 'modern' surroundings. Not ones that seclude them forever, but rather that give women the autonomy and the ability to negotiate new public spaces.

Thereby the idea that social considerations would curtail economic efficiency can be refuted, as can the other orientation trying to show that growth can be achieved "with distribution" (Lipton), i.e. empowerment vs. efficiency.

This approach would take seriously the proposal made by Elson et al. that concepts of economy should include the relationship between the productive and reproductive sector, the debates going on on unpaid female work and its inclusion in national accounting, on complementarity between the home or caring economy and the formal economy, as well as the articulation between subsistence and market economy.

### **Discovering the gendered structure of economy**

By stressing that economy is a "gendered structure" feminist economists have made a big step forward in 'engendering' development theory. However, the argument which is most frequently pursued (Cagatay, Elson, Grown, 1995) seems to me problematic. Its proponents argue that inequality in gender relations is an obstacle to achieving the objects of macroeconomic aims of SAP. For them, the argument against the concepts of potential and instrumentalisation is not perceived as a basic critique. They very much argue within the logic of the system. They state e.g. that the gender division of labour and control of resources, especially in Africa, prevents the peasant economy from reacting to new incentives provided by SAP. This theoretical concept of incentives to which economic actors are supposed to react, regardless of the embeddedness of their economic activities (through social relations, time schedules, gendered institutions etc.) has to be challenged. The authors themselves

elaborate on the fact, recognised by institutional economics, that markets are social institutions which reflect and multiply gender inequalities.

In fact, it seems vitally important to pursue an institutional approach, analysing e.g. the social organisation of markets, the social networks guiding it and the segregation of markets according to different criteria (not only gender). This means introducing an intermediate level of analysis between micro and macro, which would be indispensable to a better understanding of economic activities (and problems of development cooperation wanting to get to grips with concepts such as informal sector, endogenous economy etc.). The micro-concept of the household has long been criticised by feminist development theory but unfortunately no relevant consequences have been drawn (Kabeer, Joeke 1991).

Cagatay, Elson and Grown (1995, p. 1833, referring to Elson, McGee 1995) "argue that it is important for donors to go beyond their traditional focus on distribution (e.g. avoidance of adverse impact on women, equitable distribution of benefits between women and men, and better access for women to social sector provision)". Here they use the concept of efficiency, defined as the "promotion of more efficient uses of resources by reduction of gender-based distortions, removal of gender barriers to supply responses, and removal of gender-based constraints on control of resources in both the productive and reproductive sectors."

Contrary to this, I think that the exclusion of women from professional/formal social services provision can indeed be observed, but it is absolutely necessary to critically analyse the type of public services being delivered, and not in all cases request state social services or always to judge negatively services which are not provided professionally. This, I think, prevents looking at different types of social services provision and their decentralised and self-determined provision e.g. at the intermediary level through a plurality of social associations etc. Here the equity argument is often very rigid.

### **Integrating "reproductive economy" in economic analysis**

The term "reproductive economy" used by the authors can be further specified by implications taken from subsistence theory (Mies 1986, Evers 1984). It is rightly argued that this economy is taken for granted and the possible hindrances due to the type of relationship with the "productive economy" are not seen. However, I think the interface and overlap with the market are not fully analysed, as should be the case when following an approach of embeddedness. The decisive contribution to macroeconomic analysis is claimed to be the "conceptualisation and visibility of women's work" (Benería, 1995, p. 1843) as well as the treatment of labour as a "produced factor". I believe though that a different type of modelling would be useful, namely one including an interface approach (Long 1992) (e.g. women producing for their own consumption and market; credit being used for subsistence; money lent for the cash crop production of husbands) and aimed at avoiding the old error of a dualistic separation between the productive and unproductive sectors of the economy. Social science approaches of articulation which have shown the subsidising of the formal through the subsistence sector are not considered in the proposed economic analysis, since these do not take the possibility of partial market integration into account, nor do they ask how the different saving rates are brought

about when talking about the feedback between productive and unproductive sector. Here, sociology can come in.

The feminist authors rightly call for the influence of gender differences on the results of macro-policies to be studied more intensively. However, they consider these differences mainly to conduce to hindrances to the reallocation of (female) labour from nontradables (i.e. subsistence) to tradables (i.e. formal sector) and the gender specific division of labour and corresponding losses in production of tradables, i.e. the market. This means that according to this concept of efficiency the subsistence sector is regarded as being less efficient on principle. It does not include considerations regarding such dimensions as security, food security, sustainability etc. which, however, have been the decisive results coming out of women's research. This concept of efficiency does, in short, not take into account the social, gendered embeddedness of economy and its relationship with sustainability. (I do not want to instrumentalise this term, but enlarge the scope and approach of analysis.)

Elson (1995, p. 1851) does indeed elaborate on what she calls (more egalitarian) "systems of gender relations", what could be called the 'gender order' in the economy, and talks about the latter being embedded in a "social matrix", which would correspond to our idea of social and cultural embeddedness. In other words, the feminist economists, although not referring explicitly to this approach, open up venues for a theory of embeddedness, envisaging "changes in the structure of entitlements and the social matrix in which macroeconomic processes are embedded". The merit of this is that it goes beyond the approach of only disaggregating one variable from a gender point of view (Elson 1995, p. 1852), to add a "non-monetary sector of social reproduction" as a "constraint or resource" so as not only to look at the formal economy, but in particular to consider economy as a "gendered structure". I think it is not an issue of modelling but of analysis to show how this structuring takes place by the degree of gender inequality in the labour and credit markets, in decision-making in households and the public and private sector, in the capital-out relationship, saving and investment rates and import rates. This is where it is argued that redistribution in favour of women will, in the long run, increase growth rate and would be necessary in terms of equality. Feminist economists call for policies to increase education and control over resources, as well as to eliminate gender-specific discrimination on labour and capital market (cf. also Palmer 1995, pp. 1983 ff.). This, unfortunately, is not very far from the recommendations made by Esther Boserup (1970), which were rightly criticised as being modernist and failing to look at transformation and difference but assuming instead that economic behaviour stays the same.

The ideas just outlined of course are not entirely new and I do not think that they might lead beyond the creation and testing of hypotheses (Cagatay, Elson, Grown pp. 1831), as they are still bound to a positivist outlook. However, one should support their asking for more empirical analyses of the feminisation of labour and labour intensity. They argue that SAP lead to the feminisation of the labour force through the deterioration of income distribution and growth of exports, which has very ambivalent results with regard to quality of life, stressing as they do the importance of "social efficiency". I do not think that one should criticise the increase in the female labour force; however, it is correct to stress the importance of the informal labour market and to drop this distinction anyhow.

This implies a fundamental conceptual problem which conventional development theory has not been able to resolve up to now and which could be handled by an embeddedness approach. By doing research on female and/or local economy bottom up, multiple fields and activities are covered, including their interfaces - between women and men, urban and rural etc. (Examples are ongoing PhD research at the University of Bielefeld on Harare and Windhoek by Gerlind Schneider, 1998, and Winnie Wanzala.)

Elson (1995, pp. 1856) presents very good arguments why women do not come up to the expectations of SAP, pointing out the persisting invisibility of unpaid female labour, e.g. through privatisation of social services. But these arguments could be said to remain at the level of exclusion; instead they should go further to make fully understood the interconnections e.g. between subsistence and cash crop production, or better still, to distinguish between products for different markets (local and other), look at the special 'social nature' of products as regards social obligations, labour demands etc. Elson rightly objects (1995, pp. 1860) that gender disaggregated data is not sufficient, and that there is no account taken in such data of what we would term the 'caring economy' as an important economic activity. Here Elson argues very appropriately on the basis of what I would call the logic of agency, including security considerations and the general exclusion of women from formal agriculture and economy (e.g. from marketing boards and structures), as well as from contract agriculture and, I would add, co-operatives. These are the necessary arguments for analysing discrimination, but embeddedness has to look in addition at links between e.g. the caring economy and cash crops, in far as the social organisation of production is concerned.

Elson also rightly criticises the simple approach of merely asking for barriers to be eliminated in order to integrate women more into the market. She, on the contrary (1995, pp. 1863), considers that "The key gender issue in the reallocation of resources during structural adjustment is not the immobility of women's labour, but women's weak and unbalanced entitlements, and lack of voice in the determination of economic priorities". This is certainly the case, but also here she does not look at positive aspects of the interaction of subsistence and market production. Elson asks for analysis of changes in "structures of entitlement" and calls for a comparative institutional analysis. A sociological approach however would go further to positively analyse gendered structure as being not always due to "traditional" subordination, and equality not at all being desirable in the sense of having one gender-uniform economic structure. Gender means difference and this is so difficult to grasp in economic modelling. According to Elson, the simple type of gender disaggregation could be used in economies where women have different income sources and make different investments. This, however, I think is valid for many sectors in development economies, more so than is normally assumed. These differences need not be considered dualistic, though, but rather as taking place at the interface.

With regard to institutions on the micro and meso-levels Cagatay, Elson and Grown (1995, p. 1829) stress the significance of gender specific distortions in households, government agencies, firms and even markets. They do initiate a new gender-and institution-specific orientation, when stressing that "Markets, firms, and other institutions are not intrinsically gendered but they become bearers of gender via the norms and networks that are essential for market transactions to be completed, via the

constitution of property rights, and via the endogenous development of agents' behaviour". The question is e.g., whether the old experiences in rural development projects of excluding women, making them lose their traditional rights of access, increasing their workload, making them lose access to the labour force and institutions of reciprocity etc. have been avoided in women's projects or integrationist projects. Or does the silent dis-empowerment continue in rural development? Are women becoming yet more fundamentally excluded as development policy moves to SAP and more structural issues, and as marketing organisations and input supply are privatised and no creative land reforms are anywhere in sight?

It is clear that former results of feminist analysis are so to speak translated and brought into the mainstream discourse. Elson (1995) pleads for sustainable reproduction, calling for investments in social reproduction and not only the shifting of the labour force into market production. But I think it is necessary to avoid simple equality reasoning without looking at possibilities of an alternative, or I would say specific, or in general transformative economy. In principle I think it is not enough to overcome (I do not say only) the invisibility of female labour without going on to present changes and new perspectives which would not just be postulating "alternative" models.

### **3 Embeddedness of 'female' economy**

In order to 'engender' development policy, I think that the most important yardstick should be the transformation of gender relations also in the field of economy. With ongoing transformation processes, the risk of excluding of women is growing due to de facto formalisation. The security considerations of women, their mistrust of recommendations that they integrate into formal economy and the necessary following-up of autonomous fields of activities have to be taken into account.

Therefore, going beyond the restricted analysis of supposedly negative "impacts" and the expansion of macroeconomic models following the same logic, I advocate an analysis of the gendered embeddedness of economy in society (Lachenmann 1997a). Also I suggest the use of the concept of 'female economy' in order to be able to carry out a more sociological analysis and policy debate on the meso-level. Thereby I understand economic relations beyond the level of households, i.e. structures of co-operation, alliances (e.g. with rural communities and families of origin), collective access to resources, as well as social organisation of markets, trading, modes of accumulation etc.

The issue is now how to analyse all development fields in a gendered way (i.e. not only applying gender analysis). In an interface approach, attention should be paid to interaction between different fields, groups, institutions, co-operation (e.g. in the field of technology), brokers, flexible organisation of work, analysis of concrete risks of market integration. Of interest too would be access to resources, allocation of resources in different sectors (e.g. in projects in the sphere of agriculture, where women are often excluded but form hidden strategies which then enable them to edge in after all and obtain access to new economic opportunities), collective forms of land tenure and collateral etc..



With regard to the interrelation between the formal and informal economy, as women have often concentrated either on the parallel economy far from the state (smuggling etc.), or the 'endogenous' economy, it is very important to see what is happening to these female "modes of accumulation" (to use the term employed by Geschiere, Konings 1993) with liberalisation, deregulation and re-regulation. It seems there are no new opportunities, old channels being used in a large scale manner by new speculative economic male ventures. And new economic opportunities, offered e.g. by the Social Dimension of Adjustment Programmes, are widely addressed to dynamic young urban men, thereby crowding women out of their 'traditional' economic fields. Examples are vegetable gardens maintained by young men instead of women, cereal trade run by male co-operatives instead of women etc.; or the marketing of women-grown products and training through development co-operation (with the excuse that women are not educated enough, and do not have the time or spatial mobility ...). The same effects can come about through the dissolution of para-statal and marketing boards as well as the break-down of cash crop production for world markets (e.g. coffee, cocoa) with the concomitant entry of men into food crop market production (e.g. in Cameroon) crowding women out. There is no real upgrading of women's self-employment. The link to regional economics, management of natural resources etc. has to be made.

Following a move to more empirically based gendered analyses of the economy, we could even look with more ease at possible opportunities for world trade, bearing in mind that women in many countries have been very active, and particularly so in smuggling, and therefore have been specially affected by state barriers, the legal and illegal raising of tariffs etc. Here, there are possibilities for the intensification of customary economic fields of activities of women. This is mostly forgotten. Of course there is the risk that by legalising and augmenting ongoing transactions men will step into these former niches. But in fact cross border trade up to now has been and is being restricted and liberalisation favours large scale export.

Once we consider women's specific economic activities and spaces not as being discriminatory from the outset, but as providing room for manoeuvre and difference, this will not mean preventing social change or, some might even argue, perpetuating segregation and seclusion. On the contrary, it would mean strengthening women's autonomy and providing the possibility for them to make use of, in very distinct ways, new opportunities, even niches, to enlarge existing female spaces, find new forms of negotiation and co-operation, and find new forms of making use of existing possibilities of transformation.

This approach should be valid for rural and agricultural activities as well as market integration in the informal sector. But it should also be relevant with regard to formal employment, which cannot be understood without looking at agency - which comprises strategies as well as the construction of gender and gendered structuring of spaces. An example is the research done by Jasmin Mirza (1999, doctoral dissertation, fac. of soc. Bielefeld) in Pakistan on technically trained women in the office sector. And Petra Dannecker (1998) has shown how textile workers, the typical globalised feminised workers, are acting between social conditions including family, migration and societal gender images on the one hand, and creating room for manoeuvre within the factory on the other in Bangladesh.

A very important dimension of embeddedness is "gendered social security" or social safety in the widest sense - or alternatively problems of "insecurity" and sustainable livelihoods (Lachenmann 1994, 1997b; Risseuw, Ganesh, eds. 1998). Women should be regarded as active providers/producers, instead of passive recipients of social security, suffering the "impact" of crisis and SAP. It is important to analyse strategies, such as survival strategies, different groups of women use in their quest for security within their respective production and social systems. Furthermore, it is important to look at changing social institutions and their meaning in terms of social security, at the institutionalisation of patterns, modes and strategies, at the re-interpretation of institutions, at the interaction e.g. of subsistence/market, urban/rural spaces, networks, social relations and alliances providing social security and shifting solidarities.

A lot of fund raising already takes place on the local level, in traditional or 'neo-traditional' forms. Yet it is mostly women who collect this money and who do the so-called voluntary or self-help work needed to provide basic services. Therefore the idea of cost recovery as well as formalisation of basic services provision through local government has to be very carefully watched (since this, and not the informalisation of social services feared by economists, presents a danger). It thus also becomes clear that it is simply not feasible for the economy to function according to generalised criteria of profitability and "the rest is social welfare". The same applies to non-agricultural rural activities - which in their diversity constitute an important security factor - and the informal sector. There are attempts in social movements to strengthen security oriented "subsistence" production, smaller circuits, although very flexible... - very often nowadays mainly supported by women. Questions of subsidisation - of services and inputs, as well as of interests on the one hand, of market production through subsistence production on the other - have to be discussed.

#### **4 Poverty and participatory development in Cameroon: women as "vulnerable group"**

##### **Poverty and gender mainstreaming**

The problem of poverty analysis is normally that women are labelled "vulnerable groups" and no link is made to approaches which are orientated towards analysing societal and institutional structures and relations, such as good governance, decentralisation, empowerment etc., not even towards a gender analysis of structural adjustment and links between the reproductive and productive sectors (but instead only simplistic "impact" studies). It can be shown that analytical as well as prospective concepts are all directly linked to gender and development, although this argument is not pursued in a systematic way.

In the following I want to show how short-sighted analytical approaches such as the poverty analysis approach used by the World Bank are, due to their failure to analyse social embeddedness and contextualisation - even though the report on Cameroon (World Bank 1994) does give a complex picture of the social situation, based on security considerations and taking into account a structural point of view and at the same time trying to show active strategies (Chap. I, Coping with crisis: the viewpoint of the poor, pp. 33 ff.). Its main recommendation with regard to socio-economic

development concerns an, until now practically non-existent, appropriate medium-enterprise development of the transformation of agricultural products for local consumption as the major potential expansion industry. This orientation seems very appropriate, but a lot of care should be taken not to push women out of a classical gendered field of activity, such as food transformation and marketing is, as is often the case when technology is introduced. Hereby, an important contribution to securing livelihoods and strengthening economically interesting marketing perspectives could be obtained. The informalisation of the economy is rightly stated and (contrary to other romanticisations) it is highlighted that the "participation by women in a low-earning and precarious informal sector, notwithstanding the flexibility it may afford in balancing domestic and economic activities, is by no means uniformly beneficial" (iv).

However, in terms of the WB's approach to highlighting the economic potential of women (contrary to empowerment aims pursued in Beijing), a very exaggerated image is given, aimed at looking for (gender) "differential incentives: rational economic women". An example is taken from the well known problem of separate budgeting in rice production, with women choosing "to work on subsistence crops, even though this kept the family's total income below the potential maximum" (xiv). This means that although a gendered view is applied, it is done in a very pragmatic way, and the misunderstandings to which "rationalistic" argumentation could lead to, are too many. It is rightly pointed out that women "play a major role in both food production and marketing" (p. 56), but not mentioned is the risk of women losing this economic importance when men start coming into food cash crop production and marketing, as classical cash crops are no longer interesting. WB (p. 57) also points out that "men and women (keep) separate budgets". But methodological consequences such as seriously extending data collection on the interhousehold and community level seem not to be drawn.

In its recommendations, WB (134 f.) identifies "reducing gender disparities" as one of six important principles. However, here the "major obstacle to development and poverty reduction" approach is applied, i.e. not engendering development in its own right, but rather talking about general options of agricultural policy. "Reducing the systematic discrimination against women in access to economically productive resources (especially land and financial services), lowering their excessive labour time burdens through development of and improving access to domestic and productive labour-saving technologies, and affirmatively improving their access to basic social services, need to be at the core of the country's poverty reduction strategy if full supply response and economic growth potential are to be realised". Of course, all the measures proposed are important, as is in particular the recognition that "the focus on improving food security ..., predicated on the central role of women, strongly supports this objective"; but neither agricultural policy from a gender point of view nor the construction of gender in institutions is seriously discussed.

The missing link, I think, between gender and development, poverty alleviation and liberal economic development is however very clear. I have seen (own study 1996) the problems of mainstreaming gender in development planning institutions in the striking example of the South West Development Authority SOWEDA in Cameroon, a co-ordination agency in rural development. Gender or even Women in Development were just not mentioned in the resolutions of a constituting forum. The WID

division, called "Women's Service", had been established only recently. Its objectives were "organising, mobilising, training and providing guidance to women's groups, drawing up and following up women's micro-projects, facilitating the acquisition of funding for women's micro-projects". It was hoped that it would be possible to build up networking structures with women's groups like those in the NW, where a Women's Information and Co-ordination Forum (WICOF) had been recently established.

If this agency were to become the so-called gender focus of the region as is foreseen by its gender specialist, this would mean some hope that the National Plan of Action and regional reality could somehow be brought together. In order to implement the world platform for action in favour of women, elaborated at the World Conference in Beijing in 1995, the Ministry MINASCOF had i.a. drawn up a provincial plan of action for the SW which demonstrates the very restricted and conventional approach followed by the State administration. There is no analytical gender approach, as e.g. in the very short introduction on "economic elements" gender relations or the special situation of women is never mentioned (p. 2 f.). Under the heading of "status of women in the SW province", subheading "women and culture" it is said that "women do not play a significant role", they participate "mostly during dancing and singing" - this expresses a strange concept of culture. Only very general statements are made concerning "women and the economy" and "women and the rural sector". Also the short statements on "women and environment" (p. 5) are very conventional and fail to develop a deeper analysis of the gendered resource use systems, and end by saying that "women should be educated". Practically without any reference to this introduction a plan of action is drawn up; with the "priorities of concern" being said to be the same as on the national scale, e.g. the objective of an "institutional framework for the integration of women in development and financing" and a strategy intended to "re-inforce existing mechanisms for the advancement of women" (pp. 10 ff.). Also the intention "to encourage women to pass from subsistence agriculture to industrial agriculture" is stated without further explanation – anyhow without making any reference to the above-mentioned poverty report. Short project descriptions are given, e.g. one concerning the "legal status of women", intended "to create awareness and commitments to human rights", and proposing as "activities: NGO's/Govt's services to organise workshops/seminars with customary/Local Councils/Chiefs on issues affecting women as concerns succession and land ownership and property rights" – an issue which indeed is very relevant, as the example of the Mount Cameroon Project shows.

### **Social forestry and participation of 'community' in Cameroon**

Participatory approaches for sustainable resource management are to be applied in Cameroon, according to the recently-passed legislation on national forestry policy. Community forest management plans, conforming to legal regulations, will have to be drawn up by the communities and a Cameroonian/German Project at Mount Cameroon is giving support to so-called common initiative groups (own study in 1996).

There is no gender analytical approach in the Project documents, apart from the statement that, combined with a movement back to agriculture, more environmentally negative modes of exploitation are being introduced and certain groups such as women are being marginalised. (Does this mean that

they are supposed to specially destroy natural resources?) It therefore wants to address rural women and women's groups in particular. It is quite typical not to follow a relational approach when analysing "user groups". When using the concept of "illegal" land use, especially for agriculture, in state forests, it is not clear whether women are considered; in this case, it will be difficult to improve on their activities. The gender problematic is clearly not being seen as a relevant issue, nor the social embeddedness of resource use; there is indeed the risk that through its participatory (one might even call it populist!) approach, a 're-traditionalisation' might take place in a such a way that the community is defined as "indigens", i.e. the 'indigenous population' (although a condition is stated that conflict resolution mechanisms with so-called immigrants would be found). The same holds for women in their quality of forest resource users.

The question is, what concept of community is used, who belongs, who does not? How are women's interests represented, is the former structure of parallel representation / hearing of women still in existence? Are women dependent on big men (modern and traditional), from their lineage, family of origin, their husband? What concept of actors is used, how is it defined, what idea of 'representatives of villages' is used, how are the local self-help groups with whom the co-operation is planned defined? Also the question is, how is the use of new resources and opportunities structured from a gender point of view? It is a well-known phenomenon that if gender relations change, women might be excluded, as they might be requested to do more family labour. However, it is very important to make use of new possibilities and establish the necessary enabling environment. It would be necessary to go much more deeply into gender relations in connection with the division of labour within the family, and also in the community context, in order to be able to come up with transformative issues. All the economic issues should be looked at with regard to relational aspects: how men and women are involved, i.e. through which social structures women have access to resources - marriage, family of origin, community, women's group etc. In the project area, firewood (always the most important gendered forest resource) is starting to become a problem. Until now, women have brought it back home from their chop farms (in the woods) without having to go out specially. This will change when trees are planted and agriculture becomes more permanent. In this case, women might - unlike the situation at the moment - not have the right to tree use (which must be specified according to collecting and other purposes). This is what is seen as one of the key questions regarding the underlying concept of community as regards gender relations.

There is considerable danger that a pseudo-traditional structure is being used for a new, modern type of regulation (i.e. land right based on community forestry), excluding women from decision-making and from seriously taking part in new economic opportunities, despite the fact that women groups are involved in certain tree planting efforts on individual (of family) or group (women's and farmers') farms. A very interesting event was to observe, together with local Project staff, the so-called Member Village Traditional Council's installation in a village. There were no woman members, only two old ladies, the classical woman chiefs who however have mainly ritual functions (and one local female politician whose area of competence was unclear). Thereby, so-called traditional or culture specific gender relations are perpetuated in new societal structures and regarding new economic opportunities,

not according to an autonomous social change which might include the negotiation of a new gender order, but with foreign donor assistance.

In documents, the Project introduces gender aspects only as an afterthought (whilst disregarding gender relations completely). It stresses that "the participation of women in most Project meetings has always been recorded as being very low". Here it becomes abundantly clear that "the community" normally would not automatically include women. I think it would certainly be necessary to find more direct methods of co-operating with women on a lower-than-the-community level and taking into account the gendered use of natural resources when conceiving the overall sustainable resource utilisation plan.

The Project has started to cooperate with NGOs as possible partner institutions, and started to work with informal women's groups. It seems necessary to avoid the well-known pattern of women being only organised in informal groups and men in formal ones, therefore being able to obtain access to certain institutions such as credit, market etc. The NGOs in place have a very patriarchal approach towards women. "We teach them new techniques," said the president of a NGO with regard to transformation of honey which is being introduced now on the family farm, where women have to put in the labour, and at the same time lose their competence and former knowledge. There is still a very classical idea of "helping the women" There has not yet been any effort to genderise the entire Project policy and to always see women in their relation to men and to their opportunities, in order to avoid negative consequences and assure that they participate in new developments.

In Cameroon, the WB funded agricultural extension programme claims to be very progressive; its intention was to employ more female personnel, but it is well understood that there is no gendered approach and anyhow, no new (female) officers can be employed. Also the authoritarian manner of forestry personnel and their gender biases should be an issue. It could be conceived that the Project might look for more opportunities of co-operation with regard to a higher level advocacy for gender and sustainable resource management of natural resources, like coming up with a sectoral plan.

## **5 Decentralisation, democratisation and civil society in Senegal**

DAWN (Cagatay, Elson, Grown 1995, p. 1833) calls for the transformation of gender-specific advocacy in active proposals of economic policy, following a triple strategy to challenge the market as regards greater social responsibility (I would call it social market economy) and institutions which strengthen civil society, as well as the reorientation of institutions which design policies. This, I would argue, would have to lead to a concept of civil society not perceived as representatives of organisations, but as principles of public debate and arena, shaping power, and as interacting with the state.

### **Gender relations and dwindling women's spaces in ongoing transformation processes**

In terms of an interface approach (Long 1992), we should look at different levels of societal structuration and interaction, at arenas where new gender relations are negotiated. I prefer this

approach to a dualistic one of distinguishing between practical and strategic gender needs. Also I think this could be called a "transformative" approach – thereby engendering another recent mainstream theory. Empowerment, the concept forwarded in transnational women's policy, probably would mean in the first place that women can act in civil society.

I suggest looking at changes in women's spaces, i.e. in the public and the private, as well as at new forms of organisation on the local level, especially by women. Within the framework of the ongoing transformation processes, it is necessary to study the newly emerging gender-differentiated forms of interaction (interfaces) with regard to decentralisation, all forms of associations (including peasant organisations and NGOs) and democratisation. Empirical research in West Africa provides us with a rather ambivalent picture, according to which newly established female modes of organisation and 'traditional' forms of political/societal representation are hampered by the ongoing formalisation of local power structures. The limited democratisation efforts with regard to multiparty systems and formal decentralisation and local administration tend to exclude women

We have been more and more aware of female social spaces existing in many societies - spaces whose boundaries are very diverse, and which very often dwindle in the course of socio-economic change. These spaces are defined through division of labour and co-operation(!), responsibilities and productive activities, as well as through social institutions. The interesting thing would be to investigate how they are linked to the overall system, how difference is maintained, how women can and do nevertheless claim equity in society and the political system. Decentralisation at first glance looks like being favourable for women, but it might be that more informal spaces of negotiative gender relations, in becoming more formalised, will further discriminate against women and bring the unequal gender constructs of the state down to the basis.

### **Weakening of associative power through decentralisation?**

After the near-breakdown of technical services depending on national Ministries in Senegal, in many places local, so-called self-help groups or development committees installed a kind of local administration, such as e.g. peasant organisations in the Senegalese water supply (Lachenmann 1994). Especially with regard to gender policies, local and regional technical services (such as agricultural extension) have never been functional (reducing women to community development, 'animation', etc.). The self-help-services however are to a large extent borne by women, even if the leaders are men. There is a local mobilisation of resources in labour and money (a type of tax substitute and cost recovery); nevertheless, this does or did provide a certain strength and security. However, many women's projects are captured by the village community as soon as they are running well.

My thesis is that the present decentralisation and strengthening of local government means only that now local structures and institutions are being broken up and captured from above. This will take place above all on the backs of the women. Formerly, women had certain possibilities of co-decision making or even autonomous fields which might have been limited but were socially regulated. In formal so called democratic elections women are not integrated in a more or less equitable way, because the old pattern still is valid, with women's influence passing through a kind of representation system, having

been parallel to the male one. This means that democratic elections of communal bodies are crowding out women with regard to their say in communal affairs. Sometimes, this quota system is still indirectly practised. In Eastern Senegal (study 1995) the idea was suggested to me that women are not supposed to be elected members, with the exception of one women's representative. In the 1990 elections, 5,6 % of rural counsellors (7,9 including municipal counsellors) were women. In 1995, only 14 women were in Parliament, i.e. 11 %.

In Senegal, the new decentralisation regulations concern mainly land issues and are linked to natural resource management. "It will still take some time before a father leaves land to his daughters as their inheritance" (Miriam, in Keur Baba Diouf, Sine Saloum, Lachenmann et al., 1999). She and her sister remained at their parents' home, but the land was given to their husbands. Collective access of women's groups to land and new economic opportunities often seem to be the way forward. Sometimes it can be negotiated; however, formal attribution seems not to take place.

In one rural community in Senegal (M.H.) we were able to observe the distribution of food aid in the rainy season (summer 1998, Lachenmann et al. 1999). Here, only men were present – village heads or their representatives – and had come to collect the goods. On the other hand, at a urban community not very far away I observed a large number of women assembled around a catholic church (there are some in this region). This was a typical event where women gather publicly. We learned that the local catholic priest had distributed some products, and many women had come from even far away villages. No more goods were distributed, and we saw women walking home late in the evening. My informant told me that some villages had been completely abandoned by men, or men sent their wives back to their families of origin with their children.

In the natural resource project, as well as in another country-wide project of the Senegalo/German co-operation called "literacy for rural councillors", mainly men are trained – as it is a fact that very few women are elected. In the above mentioned commune (M.H.), we had interesting talks with the four women councillors (out of more than 30). They were extremely bitter, saying that men were hindering women. None of them was member of a "hard core" commission, such as finance, environment etc. One of them was the former (first) President of the CR, and came from a noble family, one was an elderly woman from a village associated with her, one was the secretary of the Sous-Préfecture (administration), and one was "representing" the young women (i.e. rather following the old status concept).

### **Women being captured by the State at the local level**

Nevertheless, they were responsible for a special gift which the Government had "given to the women" – in every CR and urban commune, a "case-foyer", a fine-looking building, inspired by Arab architecture, not yet in operation. There were a lot of talks about money having been giving to run it, at the wrong moment (for a cereal bank); now women wanted to distribute it (this is the idea, every woman always has to get her share) as a credit to do small trade (at incredibly high interest). This is a clear expression of the State's symbolic capturing of any female civil society, in continuation of the former capturing.



I would like to suggest that there is a serious attempt by Governments and State Development Structures to (re-)capture the local society through renewed action with regard to women's programmes. It might be possible that this is being promoted— in a counterproductive way – through the Process of Preparing the Beijing Women's Conference and the so-called post-Beijing process, including the elaboration of a National Action Plan. Here, a continuous process can be observed. In 1997, I was able to observe that for the Women's Fortnight the festivities were used to applaud the President who comes from the Socialist Party which has been in power since independence. The Fortnight had been explicitly held under the slogan "Women and Decentralisation". But it was very clear that the central State was trying to re-capture their associative structures. The decentralisation process was also used to mobilise women for the regime in power. In the above-mentioned provincial town the female president of the peasant organisation at the national level, who is the former WID specialist, was jointly organising one of these public events / rallies together with the Women's Affairs Minister and Governor. So my thesis is again that the State is very clearly engaged – through the Beijing co-ordination process and in general through foreign aid - in a process of capturing and socio-technocratic WID. The question is, how can women's movements and women in decentralisation enter into serious debate about socio-economic transformation?

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