Entangled Anthropology

The Problematic Practice of Gendered Anthropological Analysis of Development

by

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May 2001
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Abstract
This paper discusses the difficulties of conducting gendered anthropological analysis in a development setting, here illustrated with a report from a Minor Field Study (MFS) in Sukumaland, Tanzania. The problematic aspects are partly located in the paradox of on the one hand being loyal to the techniques and critiques of feminist anthropology, and on the other hand bringing over the critique of development in terms that can be worked with in development projects. Feminist critique, of development or of any male hegemonic power structures, is also being criticized for being ‘Western’ and is consequently not in a position to speak for those women who are not. Further the anthropological involvement is problematic because of the ambiguous position the anthropologist occupies in the layers of power at play, being closely associated with the donor, yet trying to defend a ‘local cause’, which in its turn is being defined as such by the anthropologist. The MFS report, and the criticism brought forward in it, is found to illustrate these problematic aspects of gendered anthropological analysis of development.

Keywords: Gender analysis; feminism; development; anthropology; local institutions; HESAWA; Sukuma; Tanzania.
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Acknowledgements

This paper, which has taken a considerable amount of time to finish, is based on a report completed in 2000, after a two month Minor Field Study (MFS) in Tanzania. The MFS was financed by the Swedish international development cooperation agency (Sida), and I am grateful for that support, without which I would neither have been able to undertake the study, nor finish this paper.

During the field-trip many people helped me and supported me in various ways. My thanks goes to all the staff of the HESAWA programme who welcomed me, assisted me in finding accommodation and interpreters, accompanied me while collecting data, and were great company. Especially, I would like to mention my supervisor in the field, Mr. Barnabas Katigula, who arranged everything so perfectly for me. His welcoming manner, useful comments and advice concerning fieldwork made it all a bit easier. This also goes for Mrs. Bernadette Fumbuka who assisted me in the field the first days, making me feel at ease and introducing me to the villagers as well as to the delicate task of interviewing. The Ngudu HESAWA team, especially Mr. Mugeta, Mr. Mkaare, Mrs. Izengo and Mr. Swema, contributed greatly to making my stay in Kwimba rich in both field experience and friendship. I also thank Mrs. Eva Sävfors at the HESAWA office in Mwanza for interesting talks and pertinent comments.

A very warm thanks goes to the people of Manawa village, especially the family of Mzee Matobogolo where I got superb accommodation and food for three weeks, and Mama Salume Anderea who helped with everything. The support I was give during these weeks made it possible for me to get much more of my work done than I had expected in this short time. The warmth and friendliness of Mzee’s family made me feel more than welcome, and I hope we meet again.

At home I thank my very patient supervisor Dr. Per Brandström, for the initial contacts with HESAWA and for his swift replies to questions, and readings of earlier drafts of this paper.

Annika Waag, May 2001
Introduction

The issues of concern in this paper are related to theories on women’s place in culture and society. Feminist anthropological perspectives on women and men as gendered categories challenge hegemonic representations, and look for the underlying power processes producing representations of ‘real men and women’. Different feminisms also challenge the representation of ‘women’ as a singular monolithic subject, and point to the different realities and experiences of women. In the practical situation of a “Minor Field Study”, presented as a report in this paper, the relevance of theory is put to test in the gendered analysis of a specific context. The task is not an easy one, as issues relevant to feminism, to anthropology and to development are constantly intermingled in a discourse of power that no one can escape.

On the terminology used in this paper, a few things should be remarked. The concepts or terms used to name different parts of the world, and the values that cling to these terms are neither satisfactory nor in any way straightforward or clear. I have chosen to stick to the old term ‘the West’ although this in no way is an unequivocal reference. Basically it does not even refer to a certain location, and whatever it includes can hardly be labelled under one term, as the countries or states or ideas that it nominates differ considerably. Yet, the term can be understood by most, and the supposedly more politically correct (?) terms ‘less developed’ and ‘more developed’ countries somehow feel even more inappropriate. ‘North’ and ‘South’ strangely enough seem more vague than the ‘West’, as the latter notion carries certain connotations in relation to ‘development’ that ‘North’ does not. ‘The West’ in this paper mainly comes to stand opposed to ‘the Third World countries’, which Henrietta Moore laconically calls ‘The Rest’ (1994: 115), and the same reasoning as above applies to the use of this term too.
**Method and objective**

The intention of this paper is to analyse the gendered anthropological analysis of a Minor Field Study undertaken from mid December 1998 to mid February 1999 by the same author. The paper consists of three different parts, of which the report from the Minor Field Study (“Sustainability, gender and the use of local resources within the HESAWA programme: An analysis of participation in local networks amongst the Sukuma in north-west Tanzania”, (2000)), forms the second part. The first part of the paper gives an introductory overview of some relevant issues in feminist anthropological writing, in relation to a general feminist discourse as well as in relation to development efforts in the so called Third World. The report is then presented, and should be viewed as standing free from the first part of theoretical issues, as the literature consulted in the first part was not taken into account when writing the report. Finally, in the third part the analysis made in the report is scrutinised against the theoretical presentation in the first part.
1. Feminism, anthropology and the development context

There are many aspects to take into account when dwelling on feminist issues, even more so when dealing with feminist anthropology, not to mention feminist anthropology in a development context. While feminist studies implicate the complex relation between a perceived female subordination and male domination and the work of laying bare its causes, generally on a world-wide scale (Moore 1988:10), feminist anthropology adds the problematic aspects of the different situations, societies and positions in which women find themselves, as well as the problem of claiming to represent others with a ‘western’ feminism. Marilyn Strathern states that for a feminist anthropology, “[t]he task is not to imagine one can replace exogenous concepts by indigenous counterparts; rather the task is to convey the complexity of the indigenous concepts in reference to the particular context in which they are produced [and] to show the contextualized nature of indigenous constructs by exposing the contextualized nature of analytical ones (1988:8).” In a development setting feminist anthropology has to deal with an additional power-aspect, of a more practical nature than academic pondering and theorising. Here the already fragile texts on local women and men’s gendered relations, situations and positions have to be confronted, and comply with an often dominant western discourse of ‘less developed’ and ‘more developed’ societies. The general idea being that the former can change into the latter by adopting the latter’s knowledge, techniques, ideals and social forms.

Feminist anthropology and the questioning of hegemonic structures

Feminists and the early writings by feminist anthropological scholars were focusing on ridding themselves of the ‘naturalness’ of being a man and a woman. Strathern writes on the feminist debate that “[t]he aim is not an adequate description but the exposing of interests that inform the activity of description as such (1988:22).” An analytical distinction between biological ‘sex’ and socialised ‘gender’, introduced by the anthropologist
Gayle Rubin (Rubin in Nilsson 1996:114), served as an opener to the study of ‘men’ and ‘women’ as culturally created concepts open to change. Consequently all ‘natural’ explanations for social life were viewed with suspicion, and the creation and upholding of hidden power-structures of a patriarchal hegemony could be brought in the open and questioned. In the nowadays classic 1974 studies by Michelle Rosaldo and Sherry Ortner, models were sought to explain the, as perceived, universal subordination of women (Moore 1988:13). Ortner’s analysis, claiming the reason to be that women universally are associated with the ‘inferior’ nature, and men with ‘superior’ culture, has been a favourite reference of critics ever since, as has Rosaldo’s sphere-theory of domestic and public arenas. The main problem perceived is that while intending to explain universal gendered asymmetry by other than biological facts, both essays ultimately do base their explanations on women’s reproductive functions (Lindgren 1998:19).

Within the anthropological discipline there has been and is disagreement whether inequality between the ‘sexes’ is universal, or whether inequality should be seen as the product of particular social forms (Strathern 1988:28). But the agreement is unanimous “[…] that anthropology’s task is to uncover the presence or absence of male prominence, and by the same token uncover the foundations of gender relations, in concrete social instances (Strathern 1988:34).

Other explanations than the biological as to why gendered relations are lived and perceived the way they are in different socio-cultural settings have been sought for instance in sexuality (Kulick 1997), and in a ‘role-based’ instead of ‘existential’ gender identity (Kopytoff in Nilsson 1996:117). The model of two different ‘genders’ or ‘sexes’ defined by their neutral biological sexual organs has been viewed as a “Euro-American folk-model” (Lundgren & Kroon 1996:80), a naturalised cultural creation that cannot be expected to have bearing in all societies. The questioning of the biological genitals as determining for the social and symbolic gender roles lies as a basis for these alternatives. In the same line of critique is the questioning of the separation between the analytical concepts of ‘sex’ and ‘gender’, where the ‘sex’-part has been left untouched, a ‘natural’, neutral, given fact, not to be scrutinised and analysed (Lindgren 1998:30).
physical body has been ignored in the analysis of gendered persons and relations, even though the analysis basically concerns exactly that. Early critics of the sex/gender distinction questioned the ‘neutrality’ of the biological concept of ‘sex’ already in the 1970’s, and Henrietta Moore writes that ”[...] the notion of ‘sex’ does not exist prior to its determination within a discourse in which its constellations of meanings are specified, and that therefore bodies have no ‘sex’ outside discourses in which they are designated as sexed. Consequently, the constellation of fixed binary sexes, with fixed categorical differences, is the effect of a specific discourse (Moore 1994:12-13”).

Lundgren and Kroon suggest a model where the body occupies a key position as a dynamic and symbolic unit, changeable and inducing change at the same time. Only as interpreted and socially constructed can the body also be found dynamic and constructing (1996:81). In their work with transsexuality and the psychiatric view of sexual identity they see a camouflaged hegemonic power-structure in the two-sex-model, as the symbolically charged bodies are expected to represent an inner, ‘true’ and stable (gender) identity. On the outside the symbols of power are identified in the ideal small, neat female body and the big, muscular male body, respectively representing powerlessness and powerfulness (Lundgren & Kroon 1996:103). The physical dynamism of the surgically changed transsexual body, and bodies’ symbolic dynamism as created and creating, make Lundgren & Kroon question the two-sex-model and the hegemonic power-structure that goes along with it.

A tense, ambiguous and changing body can hardly guarantee consistency with an assumed inside, and the demand for conformity between outside and inside is breaking up; the outside/inside logic is put to question. Thereby also the idea of “unity” and the “naturally” dichotomous sexes is dissolving. Unassorted, inconsistent “sexes” are made visible and the mechanisms of power are revealed when they cannot any longer be camouflaged behind the veils of the “natural” model of two-sexes (Lundgren & Kroon 1996: 103, my translation).
No matter what is put forward as the basis of individuals’ engendered identities and the socio-symbolic gendered patterns found in different contexts, the aspect of asymmetry and inequality remains at the core of feminist writing. ‘Inequality’ thus constitutes a main issue on the feminist agenda. There is, however, a major discord on how to approach inequality. “The central issue is an old one: if we want to see women as effective social adults in their own right, is it enough to say that they have power within a specific female domain, or must we argue that they have power in those areas of social life which have so often been presented as the public, political domain of men (Moore 1988:39)?”

Gender has, within anthropology, been approached from at least two different perspectives; seen as symbolic constructions or as a social relationship (Moore 1988:13). The first perspective takes gendered asymmetry to be universal and based on culturally constructed symbols (like the domestic/public opposition) that can be cross-culturally compared. The gender roles and relations may thus vary, but those differences are ascribed to ‘culture’ and the culturally produced symbols that make up what we perceive as ‘men’ and ‘women’ contain an inherent asymmetry. The scholars who focus on gender as a social relationship maintain that women’s subordination is not universal, by focusing on what men and women do rather than on their symbolically ascribed qualities (Moore 1988:30-31). The universal assumptions are seen as ethnocentric and, in the case of Marxist feminist anthropology, related to the development of private ownership (Moore 1988:31). Leacock argues that in ‘pre-class’ societies women and men were autonomous individuals, who held positions of equal value and prestige. These positions were different, but that difference in no way implied inferiority or superiority (Moore 1988:31). Instead of hierarchy, complementarity has been put forward as the organising principle of gendered relations in these societies (Hubbard & Solomon 1995:167). The argument has come under much criticism as there is considerable evidence of ‘pre-class’ societies where the description does not fit, and as there is considerable variability of women’s position in these societies (Moore 1988:33). It is also clear that cultural ideas about gender are not a straightforward reflection of the positions that men and women
occupy in a society. As Henrietta Moore has argued: “Gender stereotypes are developed and used in the strategies which individuals of both sexes employ to advance their interests in various social contexts (1988:37).”

Many writers have described a situation where men seemingly dominate the most prominent scenes of social life, but women in fact exercise considerable economic and ritual power, only in more ‘hidden’ terms (see for instance Jell-Bahlsen 1998:119). Annette Weiner’s (1988) description of Trobriand women’s exchange of banana-leaf bundles is such an example. Women are sometimes described as exercising their power via informal relationships and networks, as opposed to men’s formal institutions. According to Scott (1985,1990) ‘disempowered’ individuals can reach their own set goals by using other means of influence than the recognised public ones, and exactly by not voicing their resistance to hegemonic power openly (Scott in Cheater 1999:5; see also Hodgson 1997:123). The question is whether such subversive acts, in the form of indirect manipulation, gossip, ritual gestures etc, are really ‘empowering’, or whether it should merely be seen as a strategy to cope with the hegemonic exercise of power. Avoiding direct challenge of male (or other) authority, but still providing women (or any ‘disempowered’ party) with an outlet, such strategies might serve merely to reinforce the gendered (or other) relations of power (Hodgson 1997:125).

The local and the global, and the ‘third world feminists’

Whether the feminist discussion is held in a strictly academic setting, questioning the grounds on which (gendered) identity is constructed or if/how conditions are shared, or whether the feminism is acted out in politics, concerned to change women’s conditions in a universal sense, the premise on which the feminist spur rests is questionable. ‘Feminism’, seen as an awareness of women’s oppression and exploitation, assumes a common ground, “a unitary body of women’s interests (Moore 1988:10)” and a ‘female’ identity, shared by individuals of the female sex. While ‘radical politics’ has to be conceptually conservative and work with terms that are generally recognised, like ‘equality’ or ‘men’ (Strathern 1988:27), ‘radical scholarship’ is more inquisitorial and suspicious of taken for
granted concepts. Nevertheless, there is and must somehow be a communal base, or the concept of ‘feminism’ might as well be viewed as redundant altogether. The feminist quest is under pressure: the more global the statements, the less bearing they will have on the real situation of real women in specific contexts. The more local, contextualised and personalised the discourse becomes, the more the ‘feminist’ aspect will be lost. Seen from an individual woman’s perspective, subordination in a specific setting might as well be due to facts of class, age, ethnicity, language, sexuality or any other building-block that makes up a person’s reality (Moore 1994: 20). These structures of intertwined differences (or similarities) make up the multiple identities of subjects, and will be highlighted depending on the context (Moore 1994:50).

Post-modernist theories have had a considerable impact on the social sciences the last decades, and also on feminist theories. As post-modernism generically rejects general theories and truth claims, the social sciences have for a large part turned to ‘small stories’, ‘local narrative’, local knowledge, details and daily life experience (Rosenau 1992:83). In feminist and anthropological terms this has meant a crisis of representation, since textual accounts of ‘other’ people are considered partial, constructed and invented (Moore 1994:107). Post-modern experimental writing, co-authorship and alternative ways of presenting the ‘text’ have aimed at unmasking the authority of the author as well as the global systems of power relations that lie unaccounted for in traditional representations of ‘others’ (Moore 1994: 107-108). The ‘facts’ presented in such texts are intended to ‘speak for themselves’. Critical readers of post-modern text have claimed that such displacement of authorship does not at all diminish the authority of the writer, it merely masks it (Moore 1994: 126-127). Any description of a culture or an ‘other’ will also by necessity be comparative since it is simultaneously a description of what it is not (Hastrup in Moore 1999: 5).

Nevertheless, if post-modernity has done anything, it has directed the attention towards the local and the contextual. Post-modern critique of ‘traditional’ representation has in common with the critique by so-called Third World feminists of ‘mainstream’-, or ‘Western’ feminism
that it rejects general theories or histories and celebrates a pluralism of perspectives (Nnaemeka 1998: 3-4). The assumptions of sameness and homogeneity that a ‘mainstream’ feminism relies on as a basis for its existence has thus been heavily questioned, since it ignores all the aspects by which women lead different lives. ‘Third World’ women at the UN conferences in Mexico City 1975 and Copenhagen 1980 questioned the myth of ‘global sisterhood’ and acknowledged the profound differences that divide women based on class, race, ethnicity, religion, language etc (Basu 1995: 3). Black feminists in the US pointed to the fundamental differences between white and black American women already in the 1960s, since racial oppression undeniably permeated the lives of black women in a sense that it did not white women’s lives (Sandoval 1995:209). ‘US Third World feminists’, united through their similar experiences of race oppression, refute the ‘hegemonic feminists’ call for unity in ‘sisterhood’ and instead points to a ‘differential consciousness’ that allows for different perspectives and feminisms to stand next to each other (Sandoval 1995:210-211). ‘Feminism’, as it stood unchallenged, has been associated with a white, bourgeois class of women, and many therefore reject the term, even those who are directly involved with ‘feminist’ issues (Basu 1995:7).

‘Third World feminism’ opposes a monolithic (Mohanty 1997: 79) view of ‘Third World women’ and can be spoken of as a range of feminisms, each developing in its specific context and addressing the issues of domination and power that are locally perceived to be the main cause of injustice. Small, local movements often prove more dynamic and successful than large national ones, and state intervention has not seldom undermined women’s movements by assuming that other differences can be subordinated gender interests (Basu 1995: 10). Focus on agency on the part of women has pointed to the fact that women are not mere victims of oppression, but also actively engage in the power relations. They are simultaneously victims and agents in societies that stress divisions of class, race, education, language etc between women (Gardiner 1995: 4).

Obiola Nnaemeka has pointed to some ‘resistances’ by which ‘African feminisms’ can be recognised. Firstly by a rejection of (the
Western) so-called radical feminism and its rejection of motherhood. Further the language of African feminisms (compromise, negotiation etc), does not rhyme well with that of Western feminism (deconstruction, challenge etc) (1998: 6). There is also a more direct and personal sense of ‘feminism’ in the African context, as issues are generally not discussed or even ‘issues’ if not related to their own immediate surroundings. Therefore, according to Nnaemeka, there is a disagreement over priorities, as Western feminist discourse nowadays emphasises various intersecting realities, like class, which feel less urgent in an African rural setting (1998: 7). Nnaemeka also mentions a resistance to the exclusion of men in women’s struggle (1998: 8).

In the light of the discussion on ‘Third World feminism’ as a pluralism of perspectives, and because of the various forms women’s movements take, a delineation of African feminism like the one of Nnaemeka seems rather inhibiting. But in a sense it is understandable, since feminist movements or discourses of women in a different context than the ‘Western’ have expressed a need to distance itself from, and radically break with, what is perceived as ‘Western feminism’. An African feminism has to be defined on its own terms, says Nnaemeka (1998: 6), though it is hard to do so since the one cannot be easily distinguished without relating to the other. Some African feminists want to claim independence from western feminism by stating that ‘feminism’ is inherent to the African context. Aidoo (1998:39) locates this feminism to the female heroine queens and female warriors of pre-colonial African societies. Sofola likewise honours African womanhood before Western and Arab cultures entered and the African woman was “stripped bare of all that made her central and relevant in the traditional African socio-political domain (1998: 52).” However, such romanticised idealisation of an African past does not only seem unrealistic and representative of only some few, elite women of certain African societies, it also produces an image of today’s African women as weak and irrelevant. Also, a discourse that wants to distance itself from a Western one on the basis of an ‘African past’, runs the risks of reifying cultural particularities and elevating it to an ‘African universal’ (Grosz-Ngaté 1997: 1).
At the other end of the spectrum of ‘Third World feminists’ there are those who define feminism as a Western phenomena which is now slowly gaining ground in, for instance, Africa (see Aina 1998:72-73). The result of such an approach might be that (since conditions in a European and North American setting are generally very different from those of African countries) any observation made on ‘African feminism’ will invariably produce a very disappointing result – if the goal is to mimic the western discourse and state of affairs.

The feminism that constitutes a ‘monolith’ and calls for ‘global unity’ on the basis of ‘womanhood’, today seems very much like a mental construct meant to serve as a punch-bag of feminist argumentation for difference and contextuality. Once a feminism based on similarity and white women’s understanding of female oppression was a ‘hegemonic’ structure, whereas nowadays such an understanding will be seen as one of many discourses, and it is unlikely to be a dominant one (Miles 1998: 163-164). Other ways are sought to unite women in their particularity. Sandoval sees the US Third World feminism with its ‘oppositional consciousness’ as a form of resistance marked by difference and a flexibility to use the differential axes of class, language, religion, race etc in its struggle (Sandoval 1995: 221). Oduol and Kabira see a strength in the diversity of women’s movements and organisations in Kenya, and they argue that “[i]n a social context where tribal, class, educational, and geographical differences make the identification and pursuit of common issues of concern difficult, it seems realistic to highlight this heterogeneity and strategize accordingly rather than operate under an illusion of homogeneity, which in reality does not and cannot exist in the Kenyan context (1995: 189).” Yet there are issues that unite women as women, in spite of the different contexts. Henrietta Moore takes the example of physical violence and rape, under which women suffer because they are women. Women are, in relation to for instance rape, universal in their particularity (Moore 1994: 17). While engaged by the differences that permeate women’s lives, this is something that is approached positively by Third World feminists, and the focus is “[…] less on the transcending of difference and more on the challenge of living successfully with contradictions, less on the
obliteration of difference [...] and more on allowing difference to be and in its being create the power that energizes becoming (Nnaemeka 1998: 3).”

The feminist movement and discourse in, for instance, Africa can be seen to differ from the Western discourse in the sense that it is more a political movement than an intellectual one. The emphasis is consequently on action instead of theory (Nnaemeka 1998: 5). A more pragmatic attitude is sometimes recognised in the strategies of African women, the importance being to achieve results rather than sticking to feminist principles (Nnaemeka 1998: 18). In this sense feminism in the ‘Third World’ can be seen to include women’s different situations, since the ‘unity’ consists of common issues of concern, rather than a perceived homogeneity on the basis of womanhood.

_Feminism and gender in the development context_

Studies on women in the so-called Third World tend to focus on the problems in a development context (Basu 1995:1-2). Women have been on the development agenda since the 1960s and early 1970s, thus becoming an issue at about the same period as women’s place was an intensely discussed item in feminist and early feminist-anthropological works. The concept of ‘Women In Development’ (WID), was used to make women more visible to development planners and make clear how important women were to development, but without emphasising a clearly feminist agenda (Hannan 2000a: 9,43; Visvanathan 1997: 17-20). In the 1970s the concept of ‘gender’ was introduced and the special efforts on ‘women’s issues’, like ‘women’s work’ and ‘fertility’, gave way to integrate a ‘women’s perspective’ in all fields of development (Visvanathan 1997:20). At the same time it was recognised that a ‘gender approach’ had to focus on both men and women, and the relations between them. In the 1980s much attention was given to ‘human rights’, legislation of women’s rights and the ‘mainstreaming’ of the gender concept into development work (Hannan 2000a: 9,45). The 1990s turned the focus more towards women again, and the promotion of ‘gender equality’ has been more outspoken. Though recognised that to promote ‘equality’ between men and women all involved need to be addressed (Hannan 2000a: 44), it has nevertheless been common
to focus on women themselves, through training in gender awareness and support of women’s ‘empowerment’ (Hannan 2000a: 10).

‘Empowerment’ is one of those concepts within development that has become fashionable and overused, to the point of almost losing its meaning and becoming mainly rhetoric (Visvanathan 1997:26). “‘Empowerment’, especially when divorced from consideration of what constitutes ‘power’, seems to be a sanitised buzz-word of the mid-1990s […] (Cheater 1999:1)”. Within the development discourse, the term has come to denote a whole array of meanings and activities, ranging from ‘good governance’; transformation into ‘self-reliant’ economies; ‘human centred development’; community development through self-help; and popular participation (Singh & Titi 1995:13), just to mention a few. The ambiguity of the term is pointed out by, amongst others, Wendy James.

‘Empowerment’ seems to have little more body to it than responsibility delegated from above, or from the centre, to monitor others below or beyond one, for whose activities one has to be accountable. One seems to be ‘empowered’ to take a share of management responsibility and decision-making, but the contemporary sense of the word does not seem to entail any direct control of resources, or scope to join with others at the same level in the structure to pursue collective bargaining with the centre. It seems oddly like the operation of ‘Indirect Rule’ in British colonial Africa (James 1999:14).

Concerning women, empowerment most commonly refers to a process by which they (or in other terms: any group considered ‘weak’ or ‘dismembered’ in a certain setting) become aware of how relations of power operate in their surroundings, and gain the strength and self-confidence to challenge those relations. “Empowerment involves awareness raising, building of self-confidence, expansion of choices and increased access to and control over resources (Hannan 2000a: 265)”. ‘Change’ is the bottom line policy that makes up the concept of ‘empowerment’, and when the latter is intended for the women in a specific
context, what will by necessity be subdued to change are the gendered relations and roles of men and women.

The general view of women in a ‘Third World’, or a development context, stands opposed to the view held by many feminist writers, Western and non-Western. The emphasis on ‘empowerment’ indicates a strong belief in ‘disempowered’ subjects (Werbner 1999:58) who need outside assistance to transform. Over all, the development discourse depicts the local circumstances in such a way that external action or intervention is required (Hobart 1993:2). Consequently, the discourse “generally fails to consider women as agents and activists in their own right (Basu 1995:2).” Yet it is often stressed in texts on empowerment in development that “[e]mpowerment comes from within; women empower themselves (Taliaferro in Hannan 2000a:267; see also Young 1997:51)” or that “[a]fter all, no one can empower anyone (Dei 1995:148).” However, statements like these are not uncommonly contradicted by a tone of language that is so difficult to avoid in development texts, namely that developers are there to do the thinking for the ‘benefactors’ of the intended change. Expressions in the line of “[s]everal “possibilities” for using indigenous/folk knowledge to “empower” local peoples for sustainable development can be identified (Dei 1995:148)”, are found in many a text. In a sense, the development world chooses for a global definition of women and women’s subordination, to be able to motivate work with Western concepts of equality. The promotion of equality may take ‘local’ turns, but the premises and the goals remain defined by the intervening part.

Sustainability is another ‘word’ or concept commonly used in the development discourse. Defined in 1987 by the Brundtland commission as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (WCED in Singh & Titi 1995: 7)”, the concept is very much concerned with environmental issues Braidotti, Charkiewicz, Häusler & Wieringa 1997: 55). Basically, sustainable development still promotes ‘growth’ but ‘without compromising the future’ (Abram 1998: 10). This also means that there is a greater concern with human wellbeing, ‘empowerment’ instead of marginalisation, self-sustaining practices of productivity and quality of life
in the local community (Harcourt 1997: 21; Singh & Titi 1995: 8). Women have somehow come to be intimately connected with sustainable development. Presentations of women’s involvement in forestry and agriculture created an image of women as crucial to the achievement of sustainability (Braidotti et al. 1997: 55). Women’s supposed closeness to ‘nature’ seems to lie at the base of such images, together with a questioning of the Western model of development as the only possible way. ‘Traditional’ knowledge has come to represent an alternative to the destructive modern forces, as it has been considered harmonious with nature (Braidotti et al. 1997: 58-59). The ‘myth’ of the ecological wisdom of ‘native people’ has been criticised by many, as ‘indigenous knowledge’ tends to be seen as a homogenous and static entity, removed from the larger political and economic context in which ‘local’ people operate (Wade 1999: 74).

Just like notions of ‘tradition’, ‘culture’ and ‘indigenous knowledge’ tend to become reified, homogenous and static ‘objects’ (Lindknud 1998: 145-148) to be taken into account in development work, ‘gender’ is also at risk of being treated in the same way. The fact that gender has been on the agenda since the 1970s does not make it an easier concept to work with, and especially not in general, systematic terms. Texts on development policies rarely problematise the own pre-conceived ideas on what makes up gender and how relations between men and women are perceived. It is much easier, for instance, to state that “[a]s the situation stands, women are denied access to land, capital, improved technology, education and training. As a result, their productivity is low. Since they are subordinate to and ‘controlled’ by men, their labour inputs are exploited without a just return. Finally women lack the time, energy, skills and motivation for active involvement in community affairs (Hannan 2000b: 10)”. The view that women’s conditions would be extra unfair in ‘traditional’ society as compared to ‘modern’ society is widespread (Miles 1998: 170; Mohanty 1997: 80; see also Oduol & Kabira 1995: 193; Visvanathan 1997: 17). Julius Nyerere expressed himself rather carefully when stating that “[…] women in traditional society were regarded as having a place in the community which was not only different, but was also
to some extent inferior. [...] Although it is wrong to say that they have
always been an oppressed group, it is true that within traditional society ill-
treatment and enforced subservience could be their lot (Nyerere in Hannan
2000b: 3)”. But the message is that the subordination of women is greater
in a traditional context than in Nyerere’s ‘new’, socialist world based on
equality and sharing of burdens and means. Feminist scholars have
documented that Western ‘equality’, and Western women’s ‘freedom to
chose’ can be seen as a ‘myth’ (Harcourt 1997:15; Miles 1998: 163), and in
some circumstances ‘traditional’ societies have been viewed as more
egalitarian (Moore 1988:29). Even so, the idea of generally more
subordinate women in a ‘traditional’ setting seem to be shared by the bulk
of development agencies and policies, as the local gendered relations are
generally to be changed into a ‘gender equality’ that is perceived to benefit
all involved.

The feminist anthropological stance has been, and is in some
ways, problematic in relation to this question of subordination. First of all
within the discipline, as there is no general agreement as to whether
universal female subordination should be seen as a fact, as in the ‘symbolic
approach’, or whether different cultural contexts provide a completely
different framework for how to perceive the gendered relations, like the
scholars approaching gender as ‘social relations’ claim. Generally,
antropology has favoured approaches that look for common ground
between well-specified historical and cultural situations (Moore 1994:11).
In the context of development, anthropological writing has also focussed on
women’s agency and the different roles individuals play, but in general this
has not had much impact on development studies (Stamp 1995: 72).
Secondly, the anthropological stance is problematic in its relation to the
practical dilemma of promoting the ‘local’ (gender) reality, but only for the
goal of facilitating the ‘empowerment’ or ‘development’ of the local
society or group, as defined by the ‘developers’. Filer talks about a
‘multilocal’, ‘multivocal’ and ‘multifocal’ ethnographic enquiry where
anthropologists more often find themselves acting as ‘honest brokers’
between the different stakeholders, than advocates of the local communities
(Filer 1999:89). The role of the anthropologist
[...]in the process of ‘empowerment’ is normally understood to involve some ‘local and global’ action, where a particular ‘community’ which has been the subject of intensive ethnographic study gains additional power from the advice, material assistance or mere presence of the anthropologist, while the anthropologist also seeks to mobilise additional opposition to the main source of this community’s oppression or disadvantage by ‘advocating’ their cause before some kind of global jury whose paradoxical function is to pass judgement on the fundamental conflict of interest identified in a given setting (Filer 1999:90, original emphasis).

A paradox in this situation is whether to point to the ‘vulnerability’ of ‘women’ or ‘the local’ in the (gendered, economic, political or other) relations of power, or whether to point to the agencies and strategies used to cope, resist or manipulate the hegemonic structures. Choosing the first option means that the ‘local’ can expect more ‘help’ and material benefits from the ‘global’ intervening party, but it undeniably compromises the anthropological perspective on agency and individual strategies. Choosing the second option would not only reverse the above description, but, if matters are carried to an extreme, would seriously question the whole foundation of ‘development’.

A ‘gender perspective’, adopted in most projects dealing with development, has been less concerned with the local gendered relations, roles and power-structures as such, and more with already conceived-of formats for ‘equality’ and ‘gender’, and how to implement these in the project-reality. There is generally little or no interest in, or time for, getting to know the specific conditions in which men and women think and act, and even less so in learning from the local experiences. This comes naturally, since the way ‘development’ is conceived of and practised renders it an almost exclusive one-way flow of experience.

Even though the inherent power-asymmetry in development work has long been realised and there is a ‘want’ within development-policies and among ‘developmentalists’ to do away with the ‘neo-colonial’ tendencies, by turning the decision-process upside down in so called
bottom-up approaches or focus on ‘grass-root’s’ movements and needs, the power-element does not just disappear, but is rather displaced. “Empowerment, of course, implies that all intervening brokers should be eliminated from the consumer’s capacity to choose. [……] Yet […] the devolution of power from state to community may increase rather than decrease the potential for brokerage, not least among anthropologists (Cheater 1999:7)”. Notwithstanding that aspect of the power-discourse in development, there is still room for anthropological perspectives. The issue of concern is how to position the anthropological self between the local, the global and the own observations. Simone Abram suggests a position where anthropologists can “act as analysts and commentators on political situations and processes (Abram 1998: 15-16)”, since the anthropologists’ concern with the local in development sheds light on the global issues by making explicit taken-for-granted procedures of power, therefore making anthropological writing intrinsically political (Abram 1998: 15).

Women in changing society

All societies are changing societies, but the conditions for change are markedly different in a development context, where strategies are developed and techniques are used to reach specifically set goals within specified periods of time, as compared to a non-development setting where society changes and develops under more or less strategic policies, and at a pace that no individual can predict. No matter what are the circumstances, women are usually seen to occupy different positions than men in relation to changing society.

The general view seems to be that women in pre-colonial times occupied positions that gave them more freedom and a greater influence than during and after colonial influence (Hubbard & Solomon 1995: 167; Stamp 1995: 69-70; Nnaemeka 1998: 14) and that changes forced by the colonial governments put a much bigger work burden on women’s backs than on men’s (Oduol & Kabira 1995:195). In many instances, women have also reportedly become more dependent on men in the context of development, wage labour and industrialisation (Basu 1995: 6; Moore 1988: 33; Swantz 1985: 8). ‘Modernity’ cannot be said to be ‘all good’ or
‘all bad’. Thus most aspects of modern life are welcomed by women and feminists, but the institutions or techniques used to implement this life might work as oppressively as the situation the women wish to step out of (Harcourt 1997:13).

When changing factors in society are adhered to outside influence or ‘globalisation’, women are often ascribed the position of preservers of the local culture and ‘traditional’ customs (Kristmundsdottir 1999: 46). Traditional gender values here take the form of resistance to processes of globalisation (Kristmundsdottir 1999:49). It can also be that, as men appropriate the world made available by colonial and postcolonial trade, women are seen as “visible reminders of enduring norms of social conduct (Strathern 1988: 77)”. Bernal reports that in the Sudanese village where she did research, “women are cast as custodians of local tradition and men represent modernity ( Bernal 1997: 131)”. This in a setting where modernity stands for a ‘more correct’ understanding of Islam, linked to education, sophistication and an elite status, and traditional, inferior understandings are linked to the local (Bernal 1997:140). Based on representations of women as more prone to ‘tradition’, blame often falls on them when planned development and changes do not occur the way intended (Swantz 1985: 1-2). In the same line of reasoning, Weiner means that the ‘invisibility’ of women’s business was one reason why the Trobriand culture could keep together and resist big changes, despite influence of missionaries and traders (Weiner 1988: 27).

Anthropologists have also documented situations where men have come to stand for traditional values and women for change and mediation with outside influences (Stirrat 1989; Carsten 1989; see also Hodgson 1997). In the small fishing community of Ambakandawila, women were the sole caretakers of the cash made from selling fish at the market. Men referred to money as ‘filth’, and considered it to upset the correct order of caste relations (Stirrat 1989: 99). In the position they occupied, women in fact directed much of the village economy and handled the whole economy of the family. They had considerable influence on how to spend the money, even concerning items that men needed for their work. The women of the village had also adopted ‘male’ habits like smoking
tobacco and drinking, something that would never have been accepted from
women in inland villages (Stirrat 1989: 98). Similarly, the women of a
Malay fishing-village exclusively handled the family’s earnings. According
to Carsten this was so because men saw commercial relations as antithetical
to the kinship morality of mutual help (Carsten 1989:117-118). Commercial trade was in the hands of the Chinese, who are external to the
moral community of the Malays. Women here played a mediating role
between the commercial and the household by turning the money into
consumable goods, thus sustaining the family (Carsten 1989: 118). Women
in this sense “[…] have the ability to purify money, to socialise it and
invest it with the values and morality with which they themselves are most
closely associated. Divided male money becomes united kin money
through the interposition of women in the house (Carsten 1989:136)”.
Thus, even in this context women are associated with ‘tradition’, but this
fact is being used to mediate external influence.

No matter how women are affected, and are perceived to be
affected, by a changing society, it is important to recognise agency on their
part. Women and agency have long been a complicated matter. Generally
women have been considered responsive, waiting and passive in relation to
men. They have been patronised for not being active, and scolded for being
selfish if acting independently (Gardiner 1995: 2). In development a view
of women as passive problematic targets of interventions has been
common, and women’s choices are seen as reactions rather than actions
(Stamp 1995:72). The question can be asked, of course, what action can be
seen as isolated and without relating to other actions. Viewing all actions as
inter-dependent thus makes everything either ‘actions’, or ‘reactions’. Even
though their responses and reactions to a changing society might be
different, both women and men are actively (consciously or unconsciously)
generating representations of gender for their own uses (self-
representation) and to classify others (representation), as part of the process
of constructing themselves as persons and agents.

“Gender relations, in Africa as elsewhere, have never been
merely a self-contained matter of “local” ideas or “local”
practices. Throughout history and across space, “local”
gender relations and ideologies have been constituted in
interaction with translocal material, social and cultural processes; both men and women take advantage of the opportunities and constraints provided by these translocal flows to either reinforce or renegotiate not only their relationships, but their dominant concepts of masculinity and femininity as well (Hodgson 1997:111).”

Summary

The question of women’s universal subordination is important to consider when dealing with ‘gender’ in development situations. The different perceived bases for this subordination, and the questioning of taken for granted views on the body, the sexes and biological ‘factual’ features are interesting for the production of new theoretical feminist and anthropological statements, but less relevant in the development setting, where ‘gender’ seems to boil down to implementing equalising measures between the men and women in the ‘local’ setting. More pertinent to development is the anthropological questioning of whether we can really talk of universal subordination of women, and what we base this perceived relationship on. Like Marilyn Strathern stated “[t]he aim is not an adequate description but the exposing of interests that inform the activity of description as such (1988:22).” So, the feminist questioning of hegemonic structures does not (only) happen on the level of a ‘matter-of-fact’ situation (i.e. ‘why are the women in this village subordinated to the men?’), but on the level of the perception of subordination (i.e. ‘why is it that we see women as subordinated to men in this specific setting?’). It is thus important to stay alert to ethnocentrism when analysing gender. Equally important, though, is not to ignore the actual global/local relations of oppression or just mere exercise of power, which can be rather obvious or more hidden. In relation to this, and as brought forward by ‘Third World feminists’, knowing the local setting is eminent as women’s realities vary and are permeated by situations where they find themselves in superior as well as inferior positions, based on class, education, gender, religion, language or other aspects.
Gender and feminist ideas within development are rather commonly stereotyped, since they otherwise become too complicated concepts to work with. This means that women are viewed as inferior, passive and in need of ‘empowering’ measures, as defined by the intervening party. Agency and the different positions women occupy within the context under study/intervention are often overlooked as there is rarely time enough to thoroughly understand the ‘local’ conditions, or since gender stereotypes are applied anyway.

For anthropology, working with feminism and gender in development can become a tangled skein. This because the issue of women’s universal subordination depends on the standpoint taken, and also because a lack of recognition of female (and male) agency and/or the reification of ‘local’ knowledge and agency in development policy compromises the anthropological engagement. The position or affiliation of the anthropological self further complicates the matter. Filer’s (1999) “honest broker” may become so entangled by the different layers of power at play within feminism, anthropology and development that the ‘honest’ aspect may be substituted by a certain ignorance.

In the report below many of the presented aspects concerning feminism, anthropological approaches to gender and the personal positioning of the researcher within a development setting are present, if not always in a conscious way. The straightforward way of presenting the perceived ‘problems’ in a project situation can be seen as rather typical for a report meant to serve as support to project staff. Questioning the grounds of one’s own perceptions of these problems brings with it not only confusion for the readers who are supposed to take the report in to consideration when practically implementing the project policies, but it also makes the whole project of trying to know ‘the other’ seem rather futile. Yet, questioning the grounds of the own perception is precisely what feminist anthropology supposedly does, if we follow the above reasoning of Strathern. This forms one of the main paradoxes of gendered anthropological analysis in a development setting, as the feminist anthropological critique of ‘gender’ and the ‘black box’ of the biological
‘sex’, can hardly be applied in a meaningful manner to the practical situation in a development project.

2. Study: Sustainability, Gender and the Use of Local Resources Within the HESAWA Programme. An Analysis of Participation in Local Networks Amongst the Sukuma in Nort-West Tanzania

Introduction

The aim of this study was to investigate institutional resources in relation to gender and sustainability in the two districts of Kwimba and Misungwi in north-western Tanzania in which the HESAWA programme operates. The HESAWA (Health Through Sanitation and Water) programme aims at improving the health of the local population in the three regions of Mara, Mwanza and Kagera by means of providing clean water, improved sanitary facilities and information on hygiene. The insights derived from an analysis of the local networks and institutional circumstances and potentials were by me seen as to give some ideas on how programme related activities could be anchored in a more sustainable way to local structures. As I was mainly concerned with the gendered participation in the local institutions, I consciously chose to concentrate on women in groups and networks during the study. This not implying, however, that women alone should be seen as the main agents for reaching sustainable development through the integration of local associations. Men and women both play important roles in this process, each in their own gendered setting and equally active and involved in social processes and events.

The findings reported were to a large extent based on some 50 interviews held with women and men in three different villages spread over the two districts. Direct observation of domestic situations, water points and project activities was made possible by my residence for a number of weeks in the villages, and through accompanying HESAWA staff on their field-trips. For historic data I have relied on existing relevant literature. Where not otherwise stated, the information presented was gathered during fieldwork.
The report initially discusses the main concepts of ‘gender’, ‘gender sensitivity’ and ‘gender equality’ and how these are applied within the HESAWA programme. This is followed by a description of Sukuma gendered roles in different settings, tasks performed by men and women and changes over time reported by the informants and in the literature. Furthermore, the history of local organisations and networks in the area has been described and compared with the present day situation. Contemporary forms of organisations have been presented and compared in relation to the aims of the HESAWA programme. This with the purpose of seeing what use can be made of local organisational forms and institutions in order to improve the performance of the project. Following this, a presentation was made of observations on the work to establish Water User Groups (WUG’s), that are to be responsible for the care of their respective pump and well, as well as a discussion on how lessons could be learned from the situations in some local institutions. Finally, the issue of women's involvement in project practice has been discussed against the background of their involvement in local networks.

2.1. Gender, gender sensitivity and gender equality - project policy and project practice

The HESAWA programme has from the onset paid attention to the issue of women’s involvement in programme activities. ‘Gender’, ‘gender sensitivity’ and ‘gender equality’ are therefore well worked into the policy documents, and are concepts of which the staff is well aware. Project personnel generally understand gender as ‘the social aspect of being a man or a woman’, and it is commonly put in opposition to the biological ‘sex’. A ‘gender sensitive’ programme is, in this view, one which takes into account the roles men and women play in the society in which it is implemented. In the case of HESAWA, however, the gender sensitive approach is not only intended to be cognisant of gender factors, but it is also meant to lead to greater ‘gender equality’.

Gender equality (jämställdhet) is a concept well known in a Swedish and Western context, and it has also become so in the political development
rhetoric of many ‘less developed’ countries. It generally refers to equal rights between the sexes concerning education, job-opportunities and remuneration, promotion and representation in society, etc. Complete gender equality has, according to most people, not yet been reached in the West, despite a rather long process of feminist and women’s liberation-movement’s struggle for equal rights. However, most people would probably also agree that things have changed quite a bit since the beginnings of the feminist struggle. These days, the fight for ‘gender equality’ for example also includes men’s struggle for rights to paternal leave.

In the HESAWA programme context, as stated by staff, the main intention of a gender sensitive approach is to give women more power in decision-making. Moreover, to relieve them of some of their heavy workload by involving the men in some of the tasks previously considered as purely female and by introducing new facilities, like conveniently located hand-pumps. One staff member, when asked whether ‘gender equality’ means that both sexes should equally share all tasks in the local community, stated that this is not what it means in the project situation. He said that it would not be feasible as a goal within the programme.

‘Gender sensitivity’ may also refer to an attempt to take local ideas on gender into account in programme implementation (Widmark 1995; *Sida Evaluation Report* 1993/1:16, 80; Thomas, Schalkwyck & Woroniuk 1996, Ch.2: 1). That is to say that the programme strategy is for ‘grass-roots’ adaptations, rather than ‘top-down’ programme policy. Reading the promotion strategy and evaluation reports suggests that the HESAWA policy intends to take the local values and cultural traits into account, but specifically it is seldom stipulated how, where and when for this to be accomplished. The main weight is instead put on *gender sensitivity* in the meaning of *gender equality*. Programme policy and programme reality is, however, not always the same thing. Individuals within the staff will invariably have their own understanding of the programme. The settings where the projects will be implemented may differ from each other and from what is pre-conceived within the programme and among the staff. The result is that the most challenging parts of the policy are not always put
into practice. HESAWA field-staff may not feel it to be appropriate, or that it is too challenging to the existing gender-structures, and would therefore risk the villagers’ further co-operation. Instead, an unintentional adaptation to the local circumstances occurs within the programme, in which some of the local structures are accepted and used. For instance, when making use of the men’s village council meeting-forum in the HESAWA programme meetings. At the same time, other structures or situations are ignored, like making use of the less formal and more intimate kind of meetings that women use. Instead women have to participate in a meeting-forum in which they do not feel particularly comfortable.

The observation that there are discrepancies between programme-policy and programme-reality has also been made in Cleaver and Kaare's (1998) study on gender and project practice: *Social embeddedness and project practice: A gendered analysis of promotion and participation in the HESAWA programme, Tanzania*. The authors, moreover, see a paradox in HESAWA's claimed efforts to challenge the gendered division of labour and at the same time involve women in water-related issues on the basis of their "natural role in water, sanitation and health [...] (1998:6)". They might have a point on a theoretical level, but the observation is not, however, as insightful in practical terms. Women are definitely seen as having a 'natural role' in household-water related work in Sukuma society (this is supposedly part of the local gender division of labour). Nevertheless, to use those ideas to legitimising women’s right to take part in and influence the major decisions taken concerning water (this is then challenging to the local gendered division of labour) is a strategy which may give momentum towards achieving gender equality. The paradox exists rather in the intention to challenge the gendered division of labour on all levels, and at the same time aim for project sustainability.

Project practice is often a softened or ‘distorted’ version of project policy. Field-workers are of course aware of the importance of keeping good relations with the villagers, and as far as the villagers are concerned, the *project is simply the people they meet in the field*. The villagers are not fully informed about strategies worked out and budgets made in offices far away. To assess the project, their base of information is reduced to their
personal contacts with the HESAWA field workers and the material benefits to the community. However, the question can be asked whether HESAWA’s unintentional acceptance of some local structures would not better be turned into an intentional use of these same structures. These issues are discussed further below, under the section dealing with the WUG’s.

The complexity of the relationship between ‘superiority’ and ‘inferiority’

When talking about achieving greater gender equality, there is the assumption that inequality is at play. The issue of superiority/inferiority of the sexes is a problematic one. Most commonly the folk-model assumption is simply that women are inferior and men superior. This is often based on the fact that men play a more prominent role than women in public life and decision making. Women are bound to the domestic sphere, and even there they are subordinated to the wishes of their husbands or whichever male is ‘in charge’. In real life though, and when concerned with Sukuma (or any other) society, it is difficult to just talk about a ‘public sphere’ and a ‘domestic sphere’. Life is of course more complex than that and people play many different roles when in different social situations, not always that of ‘inferior’ or ‘superior’.

In order to give some structure to the observed behaviour of the Sukuma women a rough division can be made between four realms of different behavioural patterns. These are,

1) The woman’s relation to the husband and family, that is, the domestic setting.
2) The daily ‘street life’, communication with friends, strangers, neighbours and other villagers.
3) Village meeting situations, big organisations, official feasts and public occasions.
4) The daily work in small organisations and networks, female-oriented or mixed groups.
The first, the domestic realm, is one in which the subordination of the woman can easily be noticed in social interaction. For example, the wife kneeling when greeting her husband and looking down when she talks to him. The husband ordering her to fetch him things, the woman being generally silent and humble when he is around. In these situations, the woman should perform tasks without complaint. Also in the relation to her parents-in-law, a woman will behave according to socially acceptable norms and will rarely give full expression to her thoughts and opinions. It must be pointed out however, that this is an image of public display, giving a picture of an ideal family situation. A wife should obey her husband's orders and take care of her household and family. But both men and women will state that they co-operate in the domestic setting, and that most decisions are agreed upon together. In private the spouses’ interaction is more relaxed.

The second, public but yet private or personal realm tells another story. In daily interactions, both with other men and women, Sukuma women are usually not at all humble and silent. When greeting a man there is a moment when the woman takes a posture of respect, but as soon as this has been done, both man and woman resume a very unrestricted way of chatting, discussing, joking or, sometimes, reproaching each other. This seems largely irrespective of the age or social position of the man or woman in question. The ‘shyness’ is gone, and almost any subject can be discussed and ventilated. The third realm, that of the public village meetings, is yet another context in which women would be seen as taking a subordinate position. In bigger congregations, women and men will almost always sit separately, the men in the foreground and the women a bit further away and to one side. Men will generally speak up and women will listen or talk quietly to one another on, perhaps to them, more interesting subjects. Some women have the courage to ventilate their opinions in public, but generally the topics discussed are taken to be ‘male issues’, or the women are afraid to be laughed at and talked about. Many women explain that they often want to talk at these meetings, but they are "afraid of all the eyes that watch them" while talking. After the meeting they often regret not having spoken. The women at times chose one person
to express an opinion that is shared by a whole group. Sometimes the message gets through, but many times it does not.

The fourth realm is yet again public, but one where women play rather uninhibited roles as chairpersons, co-members and associates in group-related daily work. These groups deal with farming work, church related activities or small scale business, and can be mixed as well as women-only groups. Here the focus is on co-operation and agreement between all involved. Women say that they can air their opinions more freely than in big meetings, and men participate on the same terms as women.

On the whole men do tend to monopolise certain spheres and occasions, and women let them do so, but this is not to say that women on the whole are inferior in Sukuma society. Both men and women play out different roles on the various stages of daily life. The greeting ceremony where women generally kneel down for men, is an act that a Westerner normally would interpret as humiliating for the woman. This is however not experienced as such by Sukuma women themselves. It is just something you do, a moment of strictly prescribed social interaction. When it is done, you can be yourself again, be it a well educated, emancipated and well-off woman of fifty-five years, or a young girl who has never travelled farther than to the next village. Of course, men too have certain ideals to live up to, which can become a strain on them and their domestic relations. A man who gives in too much to the demands of his wife, will be joked about and laughed at by other men. Stories can be heard on how this and that ‘weak’ man is being bullied by his wife. He might also become targeted at home - as a ‘weak man’ - by the woman herself, if considered as such by the rest of the community. On the other hand he cannot be too hard on his wife either, as this might provoke a righteous demand for divorce.

2.2. Sukuma gendered division of labour: Tasks, relationships and changes

Taking a look at the various daily chores performed by men and women, one finds a rather stereotyped sexual division of labour. Women take care of most domestic tasks, including sweeping of the house, washing clothes
and kitchen utensils, looking after small children, cooking and serving food, fetching water and firewood etc. Men's heaviest responsibility is the farming work. They spend longer days in the fields than the women, ploughing with a team of oxen or hoeing by hand. Women also work the fields, but have a more varied daily schedule, the day being split up by their other duties. Throughout the year, the physically more heavy tasks fall on the shoulders of men. These include building and repairing houses as well as sheds for the livestock, thatching of roofs and digging of latrines. Generally, the men of the neighbourhood help each other with tasks like digging and building, thus expediting the work and also meaning that a man can rely on help from neighbours when his own homestead needs repair. Men almost exclusively look after the cattle. This includes herding and watering of the animals, milking and slaughtering, taking care of sick animals, buying and selling etc.

In short, women’s responsibility is to make sure the household runs smoothly, to take care of the family members and to keep the domestic area in a good condition in the view of neighbours and visitors. Men’s responsibility is to see to it that the family has everything it needs in order to live a good life. They have to make sure there is enough food, that the living quarters are in good repair, and provide cash for clothes, utensils, spices, soap and other necessities.

When comparing the workloads of women and men, it becomes clear that women have less time to sit down and rest. The tasks follow upon each other and there are always things to do. On the other hand, many of the chores are not ‘work-intensive’ in the sense that they are strenuous. Men on the other hand have longer moments of the day when they just sit and rest or visit neighbours and friends for conversation and food. But generally their work, like hoeing and ploughing, is more labour-intensive and monotonous, as it is not interrupted by other tasks.

When talking about the relationship with their spouses, both men and women will stress co-operation and joint agreement as the basis for marriage. The couple often work together on their fields, they agree together on the work-scheme of the day, and before every new season they agree on what crops should be cultivated and where and how it should be
done. Together they discuss the possibilities for investment and the maendeleo (development) of their household. Generally, women seem more eager to invest in ‘modern living’, like corrugated iron-sheet roofs, improved housing materials, cemented water-jars etc. Many men prefer to invest in, what is according to them, a more safe asset, namely cattle, which can easily be turned back into cash in case of need.

However, both sexes will also admit that this view of family-life is an ideal. In reality there are often conflicts and strained relations between spouses. The main cause for this seems to be money, or the lack of it (Varkevisser 1973:80). It is the responsibility of the man to supply the cash needs of his family, and women often depend on the ‘goodwill’ of their spouses. Most women do not feel comfortable with the fact that they always have to ask for money when they need it for their children and themselves. Women sometimes have money of their own, but cannot spend it on just anything without first consulting their husbands. Men, on the other hand, can and will spend money on whatever they want even if their wives do not agree. It is known that many men spend considerable amounts of money on social events, including the sharing of locally distilled alcohol. Women often cannot do much about this, a fact that creates frustration and drives some of them to snatch what they can get when their husband’s back is turned. This kind of home-situation is considered by both sexes to be a really bad thing, yet many have experienced it. Divorce-rates are reportedly high in Sukumaland, and initiatives to break-up marriages come from women as well as men (Varkevisser 1973:81). Generally a woman cannot count on much support from her own family for such actions though, as her father will then have to pay back her bride-price. Only if the marriage has generated enough children, will the cows remain with the father of the bride.

Men and women interviewed, as well as HESAWA staff, attest that various changes of the gendered division of labour have occurred, both in attitudes and actual behaviour. Today, men do fetch water with the aid of bikes, and many men do not mind helping out for example with sweeping the house and courtyard. One task that was previously strictly female is the grinding of maize, cassava, rice or sorghum to flour. While this was
traditionally done by hand on a millstone, it is nowadays mostly done by milling-machines. Consequently, many men have taken up the habit of transporting the grain to the machine to have it milled.

While men generally control the family income generated by farming cash-crops, most women make sure they get the money they need, either by asking their husbands, or by having their own income-generating business. Quite a number of times, both men and women said that women are better than men at saving and keeping money, (see also Varkevisser 1973:80-81) and when committees are elected, women are often chosen as accountants. For some women own earnings has meant more freedom and less dependence on their husband, while for others it has caused a strain on their marriage and therefore on their freedom of movement.

A majority of the women consulted were engaged in group-activities, and some of these groups are ‘development-oriented’, aiming at generating money for the members as well as funds to be reinvested in yet other businesses. Women’s participation in these groups would be very difficult if men did not approve. Men’s consent depends a lot on the local setting, as well as on prevailing circumstances. For example, if a bad harvest appears likely and the family expects hard times, more effort has to be invested in securing enough for them to survive. Less time can thus be spent on economically risky activities. But under favourable circumstances, especially if the women’s group is successful, men also benefit and will often grant more freedom to the women. This is one attitude change noted by HESAWA staff, in which women are creating greater freedom for themselves and are ‘allowed’ to do so.

Tasks related to water drawing are, as stated, mainly performed by women. However, quite many young men can also be seen fetching water, mainly with the help of a bike but occasionally also carrying water on their heads. Many of these boys and men fetch water to irrigate their vegetable gardens, but some do it to help out in the household. During a day spent at a water-point, it was quite a revelation to see to what extent water is being handled by children of both sexes. According to the observations made, about 65-70% of the persons observed at the pump were children of varying ages, between 7 and 16 years. Adult men and elder women are
rarely seen at the pump. Whether these figures can be seen as representative for the whole of Sukumaland is not clear, but the fact that children perform a great deal of the daily domestic tasks related to water is clearly still being underestimated in project practice. In the recent strategy of introducing Water User Groups (WUG’s), children are not identified and addressed as users themselves, nor targeted specifically with information about the new set-up. Education on water related issues are supposed to be given in the school-health programme, but as the school system does not always function properly, many children are not getting any information at all.

In trying to identify the mechanisms responsible for the changes that have occurred in the sexual division of labour, it seems that some of these have come about because of the introduction of new tools and techniques, like the bicycle and the milling-machine. While men in most societies tend (and in a historical perspective have tended) to monopolise new inventions and technical equipment, this is not always to women’s detriment. Regarding the use of bikes and milling-machines, one could say it has been to the benefit of Sukuma women, as men now help out with some of the heaviest daily tasks. Of course women too make personal use of these ‘new’ technologies, and so use less time milling and transporting heavy goods.

Yet another mechanism for changing attitudes, is development project activities and the usage of, for instance, PRA-techniques (Participatory Rural Appraisal) during the project cycle. HESAWA staff has made use of these techniques in their work and claim to see attitude changes, mainly among men, to women’s advantage. Men are generally viewed as the group whose attitudes need be changed, and therefore they are specially targeted. Selected individuals of groups working together with HESAWA have also been given the opportunity to participate in seminars focussing on gender-issues. During these seminars and other training-sessions, the education materials used are compiled so as to draw attention to inequalities concerning work, assets, legal issues etc. Generally, the persons interviewed were very much aware of the legal rights of women regarding divorce or inheritance according to civil law. Most individuals
were also aware of where civil law clashes with Sukuma customary law, and claimed that nowadays they follow the former in most cases.

**Ideas on ‘work’ and ‘spare-time’**

Women’s ideas on the concept of ‘spare-time’ and what they prefer to do, as well as what tasks they perceive as ‘drudgery’ or ‘pleasant’, were issues of concern in the study. In the discussion on why women sometimes are difficult to involve in project activities and especially in decision-making processes, it is often stated that women’s workload does not allow them the time to take part in meetings and seminars (see for instance *Sida Evaluation report 1993/1:56-58; HESAWA Mid-Term Evaluation 1996:28; HESAWA Annual Review 1994; Graffman & Andersson 1997:14ff*). The women themselves also sometimes give this as a reason for not showing up at meetings, although it does not always turn out to be true (Ledje 1993:40). Therefore it seemed important to know when women have time available during an average day, or when their work-schedule is less intensive during the different seasons.

Talking about these issues proved not to be so easy, as the meaning of ‘spare-time’, in the western sense, was not easily grasped by those interviewed. Women also found it hard to answer questions about ‘pleasant daily duties’ and ‘unpleasant duties’. Tasks like hoeing, fetching firewood, milling by hand and cooking, were instead seen as ‘heavy’, ‘straining’ or ‘difficult’ chores but not unpleasant. Indeed an overwhelming majority of the women claimed to like all their daily duties, even the heavy ones. One woman, when asked about what she did not like during a normal workday, responded that she most of all disliked to be completely without work. Periods without any work whatsoever could not be recognised, since there would always be something needing to be done. The women stated that if they wanted to visit friends or relatives or if something happened in the community that they found important enough, they would simply take the time and put aside their chores for the moment.

From these responses a few things can be learned. First, HESAWA water-installations will probably lessen the work-burden of women in the
sense that it will make walking distances with a heavy load shorter, but it will most probably not lessen the work of women in the sense that there will be more time for them to rest. Other tasks simply replace the time that previously was spent walking to distant wells. Secondly, it can be noted that there is a kind of ‘taboo’ on not working and not showing willingness to work. This seems to apply to both men and women, but certainly is more outspoken among women. The ideal woman is hardworking, persevering and does not show any hesitation or dislike when facing her socially prescribed tasks. ‘Having time’ would thus mean that you do not correspond to the image of a ‘good woman’ but you will be seen as idle and not taking your duties seriously. One woman interviewed, who seemed to be particularly struck by misfortune in life, had lost ten of her fourteen children and was also suffering from chronic dizziness which made it very difficult for her to perform her daily chores. She said that the worst of it all was that she was not able to look after her household and do her share of the work properly.

Yet an additional thing that can be learned is that women do take time off from their work when they feel it must be done. They will do this, for instance, to visit their own family or when things occur which they feel are of greater importance than domestic chores. The workload of women as such should thus not be put forward as the one factor obstructing women from taking part in programme related activities, especially meetings. The form and contents of the meetings might be of greater importance for women’s reluctance to show up and take part.

2.3. Organisations and networks

Many individuals of Sukuma society belong to one or more groups, societies or networks. This is so today, and it was also the case fifty or more years ago (Varkevisser 1973; Drangert 1993). However, one can see slight changes in the orientation, participation and goals of the current groups and networks as compared to the pre- and initial post independence period. But in several contemporary groups many ‘older’ elements are still there, and they often also fulfil the same functions as in the past.
Associations with a longer tradition:

-The societies of the old men, *Banamhala*, and the old women, *Bagikulu*, for example, now basically function the same way as before. These societies have been described by Drangert (1993:135) as a kind of age-grade associations. They are hierarchical in structure and their social expression performed in ritual and ceremony. The *Banamhala* society to a large extent serves the purpose of granting certain status to those initiated, keeping clear distinctions with uninitiated. To be part of *Banamhala* is to show that you are fully mature, knowing all the essentials a grown-up Sukuma man should know. Uninitiated men are not invited to share meat and beer with the *Banamhala*, and are treated and looked upon as if they were mere boys. The main occasions for the *Banamhala*, as well as *Bagikulu*, to function together is when newcomers are being initiated, when somebody has decided to slaughter an animal and throw a party for his fellows, at funerals, at bride-price negotiations and weddings. To some extent elders still deal with problems like theft, conflicts between neighbours and family quarrels. In the old days bigger misfortunes and droughts also had to be explained by the elders, sometimes by consulting a chicken oracle (Drangert 1993:135). On occasions of marriage or death the *Banamhala* society, when needed, collects money to help their companion whose son or daughter is getting married or whose family member has died. The old women’s society, *Bagikulu*, functions very much in the same way but the women’s initiation was never as complex or ritualised as that of the men.

-The *Bacheyeki* is likewise a widely known association in the areas of the present study, but it has a different function than the old men and women’s societies. Its main task was and is to assist members with help when in serious trouble. Both men and women of varying ages can enter the group by paying a small entrance fee. Meetings are called when a member in need has made an appeal to the chairperson. The whole group, which can number well over 100 people, then sit together to discuss the issue at stake. Men as well as women have committee functions, and the organisational structure is rather complex and hierarchical. Every
individual contributes when a decision has been made. Money is the most common contribution, but also food and cattle can be provided, depending on what kind of help is required. One situation when the Bacheyeki are usually consulted is when a man has made a woman to whom he is not married pregnant and she happened to die while giving birth. According to Sukuma custom the man has to compensate the parents of the woman by paying njigu ndo, (Varkevisser 1973:74) which nowadays either consists of a fine of around ten cows, or the equivalent in cash. This is for the average man a catastrophe and an amount most people could not afford by themselves. While this retribution-payment, and the bigger payment for homicide, njigu nhale (ibid.), formerly fell on the clan (luganda) of the man or on the Basumba (se below) group to which he belonged, the Bacheyeki now seem to have taken over this function to a large extent.

-The Mbina-groups were and are competitive dance and drumming societies. They include both men and women, and fill the function both of social pleasure through dancing and providing labour through the organisation of working-groups. The members often work the fields together during the cultivation season, and by the time of harvest, many Mbina groups come together for festive competition and pleasure. Mostly the members are unmarried young men and women, but some men continue dancing with the group even after they have established their own homestead.

-Before the milling-machines of today, young women did all the grinding by hand. This was a heavy task performed several times a day, since flour was commonly used for all three meals. In order to keep up with the consumption of the family and to ease the burden a bit, young girls formed informal groups to grind the grain together. This was done at a special concealed location out of sight of the compounds on a flat rock. Girls used to help women without daughters by doing their grinding as well. It was a social group based on family or friendship, and the girls were often courted by young men during their work. Therefore, as soon as a girl got married, she could not continue working with the group.

-The Basumba were youth-groups performing different kinds of work together. Varkevisser (1973:58f) reports that the Basumba groups
were involved in constructing and maintaining wells, dams and roads in the area where she did research. However, their main task was cultivation. The Basumba societies were hierarchically organised and had a rather rigorous penalty-system for those who did not do their duty or tried to escape work. The Basumba group was mixed as it included the young girls society (Banthya) and the men saw it as their duty to ‘look after’ the unmarried women. Reportedly, sexual relations between the boys and girls in the Basumba were frequent, much to the annoyance of the parents (Varkevisser 1973:63). Once married, the girls would not take part in Basumba activities any more. Basumba seem to have lost ground even more since Varkevisser did her research in 1973, but the groups reportedly still remain in certain areas, performing communal tasks when needed (Drangert 1993:139).

Contemporary groups and networks:

Among the recent kinds of groups that flourish in present-day Sukumaland, there are a few different ‘types’ one could distinguish between. Many of these are built on traditional organisational forms and principles, but have taken up new elements and partly changed their orientation.

-A common way of getting farming-activities done is to form a small work-unit with some neighbours or friends living close by. These groups are often same-sex based, but can also be mixed. Men and women appear to be members of this type of group to the same extent, which go under the collective name of Luganda (cf. Luganda, the clan). Every singular group also has a specific name of its own. Together they work the fields of the group members, often for a small fee. Money is also earned by the group by cultivating for others for an agreed sum. The earnings are either saved and invested later in goods of common interest, like hoes or household utensils, or, since people are usually short of cash, the money will be used immediately for daily needs. The main reason to join these groups is not to earn money however, but to enjoy weekly assistance on the fields, and economic support if a serious problem should arise. Most people interviewed cultivate with their group three days a week during the main season. At every occasion when work has been done, they plan for their
next action together. The structure is not particularly hierarchical, but usually there is a ‘chairperson’, and somebody who handles the common assets. All decisions are taken jointly and there are rules worked out for the members. Fines are the most common way of reprimanding wrongdoers and members who do not perform according to the agreement. The number of members in the groups range between 5-15, but are most commonly between 7-8 people.

-Another kind of group, which has grown out of the Luganda type of association, are those working in the same way, but which also focus on more development-oriented tasks. There appears to be more women engaged in these associations, possibly because they have of late been specially targeted by different national and external development programmes aimed at giving women opportunities to start up money generating activities. The concept of “Women’s groups” is mainly associated with this type of organisation. HESAWA too gives assistance to these groups in the form of credit schemes, seminars in gender-awareness and courses where practical skills are taught, for instance, pottery, the making of cement jars and improved cooking stoves. The number of members is usually of the same range as that of the Luganda, but the organisation of the development-oriented groups is formalised to a greater extent, and the planning meetings more frequent. There is usually a chairperson, a secretary and an accountant, and meetings are held every week to make plans and follow up work being done. These groups however do not only focus on producing and manufacturing items to sell, but also on providing mutual help by cultivating together on a weekly basis. Renting or borrowing a field for joint cultivation and sale of the crops is also a common way of making money.

-Religious groups are very common in Sukumaland. The number of churches of various origin and alignment is substantial. The intention here is not to name them all. Suffice it to say that within many of these churches people form smaller neighbourhood-groups (in the area where the interviews took place these were called Jumuiya) mainly on the basis of their joint belief, but they also bond together as work-units. The main purpose of these associations is to function as self-help groups by working
for each other, and by assisting each other in kind or in cash in case of need. They also farm for other people in order to collect money for the church. Many of these groups have set up *Ifogong’ho* (see below) credit institutions, from which members can borrow money and pay back with interest a few months later.

- *Ifogong’ho* is described as having started as a local village-based fund with the aim of helping members in case of death and illness (Drangert 1993:149). Today however, the *Ifogong'ho* groups are mainly focussed on lending money and making its ‘banking-capacities’ grow by means of interest on the loans. The *Ifogong'ho* functions like a bank, where money is constantly circulated (Olsson 1996:13) and used amongst its members and where interest makes the account grow to the benefit of its holders. *Ifogong'ho* is however not concerned with what borrowers do with their loans, i.e. it is not a ‘business-minded’ institution in the sense that it requires investment and yield on the side of the borrower. It often serves as a resource at a pinch, as the money borrowed can be used to provide basic nourishment for the family. As long as the *Ifogong'ho* gets its money returned with the interest required, no questions are asked. *Ifogong'ho* has become an increasingly popular way of saving money as a group. In several interviews people reported that in religious groups, the *Ifogong'ho* had been formed not so much for the sake of the members opportunities to borrow money, but as a means of group savings. Some WUG’s established by HESAWA have in the same manner suggested the establishment of an *Ifogong'ho* amongst the user group as a means to save money. This was noted when observing WUG-training sessions during a week in Kwimba district. Olsson also mentions similar initiatives in her study of the *Ifogong'ho* groups in Mwabulenga village in Magu district (Olsson 1996).

-Many of the groups active today could be classified as ‘traditional’. As reported above, the *Banamhala* society still functions and is influential in many areas. The *Bagikulu* association is much less visible today, but it seems that its social importance was never of the same calibre amongst women as the *Banamhala* amongst men. Moreover, *Mbina*-groups are still very active, and especially during certain periods of the year they provide a popular dance- and drumming spectacle amongst the populations all over
Sukumaland. The Bacheyeki associations, as described above, still function very much in the way they did before. One kind of societies not discussed so far, are the many traditional healing associations, composed of individual healers or institutionalised joint healing-cults, for example, the Bachweji. While common and fully integrated in Sukuma society, a group like the Bachweji however functions and performs its work under certain circumstances outside of ordinary daily life, namely in cases of sickness. The societies main focus is on healing from afflictions caused by enraged ancestors or by witchcraft. Therefore, these groups are of less interest for the work of HESAWA. Traditional healers and the setting they provide and function in on the other hand, could prove to be ‘local institutions’ well worth co-operating with on issues of health and sanitation (see also Ledje 1993).

Comparison of ‘traditional’- and ‘new kinds’ of networks

First of all, difference in size may be pointed out when looking for distinctions between the more ‘traditional’ kinds of organisations and the ‘newer’ types of groups. Many traditional groups were, and are, very large. Thus Banamhala, the old men’s societies, often include all the old men in the village and when gathering at special events they often number in the hundreds. The Bacheyeki association in a neighbourhood usually consists of more than 100 persons, the Basumba often counted all the young men in the area (but usually considerably fewer women). The Mabasa twin society may include all parents of twins in a certain area, and at initiations their gatherings may count members in their hundreds coming from far away. Most of the newer kinds of associations are on the contrary very small, and want to stay that way. The Luganda work-groups and the ‘development-oriented’ women’s groups often consist of only 6-7 people who work closely together. These groups will not usually accept new members once the original set-up has been established. In this way, many traditional societies can be seen as ‘inclusive’ in the sense that they are open to all whom qualify for its purposes. All old men are encouraged to enter Banamhala, and anybody paying the entrance-fee can join the Bacheyeki
etc. This while many of the contemporary groups on the contrary can be seen as ‘exclusive’ in the sense that membership is limited and that the group’s intention is neither the dissemination of acquired new knowledge, nor to build up renown and influence by enlisting more members.

Another difference that can be distinguished is the frequency and intensity of gatherings and meetings. While most societies like Banamhala, Bacheyeki, Mabasa etc. gather and organise themselves when an occasion arises, something which does not necessarily happen with great frequency, the smaller contemporary organisations meet on a weekly basis for work or planning of activities. The contact between members is thus more of a ‘daily routine’ in these recent types of groups. While in the traditional groups contact is in relation to ‘belonging’ or to certain occurrences and events.

In the structure and organisation of these various groups some other differentiating features can be distinguished. Members in societies like Bagikulu, Basumba, Banamhala etc. are often strictly organised according to rank. The hierarchy is clear and displayed in prescribed behaviour of the persons of different positions. Within the Bagikulu, for instance, when a woman of higher rank was visiting the compound, a younger member with a lower rank could not come out of her hut until the higher ranked person had risen from her chair. If the visitor had planned to stay long, this meant that the younger woman would be ‘locked up’ in the house and not able to do her tasks in the household until the guest had left. Wherefore the rule was modified and the visiting woman could symbolically lift one of her buttocks from the stool she was sitting on as a sign to the younger woman that she was allowed to go out. Banamhala too have many rules on behaviour according to rank, as have the Bacheyeki and the Mabasa within their organising committees and during their performances.

When talking to members of the smaller, recent type of groups, they all seem to describe more or less the same organisational arrangement. That is, a chairperson who should be able to keep the group together, mediate when conflicts arise and put forward ideas; a secretary who calls the group together and draws up the minutes with the chairperson; and an accountant who also acts as auditor. However, as already pointed out, a main
difference between the traditional and more recent organisations, is that
there is more freedom for personal initiatives in the latter. In these new
organisations, the members are not categorised by hierarchy nor is
behaviour strongly ritualised. Naturally, certain patterns will arise in any
group. But the ideal brought forward by members of the smaller groups, is
that everybody agrees on issues together in a joint discussion, and that the
chairperson functions as a ‘facilitator’ rather than a ‘leader’. Thus social
positions are more linked to individuality and personality than a
hierarchical social structure.

**Strong and weak points of contemporary networks**

When considering the strong and weak points of organisations and
networks, context is naturally important as the focus for study. The extent
of a group might, for instance, be seen as a strong or a weak point,
depending on the group’s function. I have decided to base the following
analysis on the criteria of efficiency, sustainability and social
impact/rootedness, all of which are aspects of significance for the work of
HESAWA.

Firstly, as mentioned above, looking at the size of most Luganda-
and the more ‘development-oriented’ groups, they are all fairly small and
want to remain that way. The members of contemporary groups stress that
their work-units are being kept small by necessity, since too many
members would mean that the group’s efficiency would be lost. It is argued
that it would be difficult to come to decisions swiftly and agree on issues
together, and it would also take longer to gather together and organise the
whole group for jobs to be carried out. The smallness of their groups is
then, according to the informants, a strong point as far as it concerns the
efficiency of work performance and minimising lengthy discussions.
Associations like the Bacheyeki, on the other hand, do not suffer from their
size, as they are not concerned with day-to-day activities. They can ‘afford’
to be big, since they do not need to keep track of their members unless an
issue arises. Daily or weekly gathering is thus more important for the
smaller/new groups than for the bigger/traditional ones.
However, at the level of social impact through spreading of messages and information, whether on health, economic- or technical issues, the smaller recent groups are less efficient because of their size and parochial interest. The nature of their work is not facilitated by involving other people, and their intention is not to expand the circle of initiated or to convince neighbours and other villagers to join them. These groups are more motivated by tangible profits and benefits for the individuals involved. Knowledge and information acquired is therefore likely to stay between members, but may be shared with close friends outside the group. On the other hand the success of a specific group could encourage other individuals to start up similar work-units, and in this way it might affect a wider circle of people. This was the case in Manawa village in Kwimba district, where one of the HESAWA women’s groups had such success with their investments that others, both men and women, expressed a wish to join. The problem is of course that no more individuals can join the unit because of the reasons mentioned above. This leaves the interested persons with the alternative of starting up a group of their own, something that is apparently not that easy since this requires effort and innovative ideas.

If we investigate the sustainability of these associations in terms of durability and ability to remain motivated, many of them have been operating for several years. Some of the Luganda groups consulted started already in the eighties, but most small working-units joined together in the early or mid nineties. The Luganda organisation, as a form of work-group, has existed for decades - here the individual units are considered. Most groups that were consulted were doing well and frequently made new plans for action. However, people who were former group members of defunct units were also consulted. Some differences were noted between the former and latter. Most of the successful groups (amongst which is the mentioned HESAWA women's group) perform multiple tasks. That is, they are concerned with farm work as well as helping with members domestic obligations, at the same time as they are (ideally) bringing in money by cultivation or manufacturing and selling products of various kinds. The groups that failed to keep together collapsed after one or two years. An example of one such group that lacked material returns was a HESAWA
group, which started to maintain the communal hand-pump of their sub-village. This association had no income activities nor was it concerned with other communal work directed towards helping individual members in their daily chores. After a while the members felt that their efforts were not leading anywhere and that they were not gaining anything. When a year with little rain followed, resulting in famine, the group disintegrated. Although the group did gain something from their work, namely a clean and well-kept water source, the general feeling amongst the members was that their work did not matter and that members received no returns. Other groups that did not make it, failed when their investments were lost due to weather conditions (tomato-gardens) or when the demand for the goods provided (earthen pots) was not as high as expected.

What can be concluded from these observations, is that groups working altruistically will lose direction when adverse circumstances force people to turn their attention to other more urgent issues. Even if the circumstances are propitious, people tend to drop out and lose interest after an initial period of enthusiasm. In the same way, groups based purely on capital investment and money-making, risk collapse if the investments fail or returns are small. The strongest and most sustainable groups seem to be those that combine domestic activities with economically profitable ones. If an economic activity does not give satisfaction, then at least the work done for the individual members does and this will in many cases keep the group going. This seems to be true for women’s as well as men’s groups. Now, this ‘combinatory feature’ or ‘multi-functionality’ alone is not, of course, the only key to success. Much of a group’s determination and cohesion depends on the individuals involved, not to mention the ability of the chairperson to motivate and keep the members together.

One negative feature of these small groups is that they do not prepare their members for ‘public occasions’ like village meetings or other bigger assemblies where speakers can bring forward their opinions. The meetings of small associations are intimate and the deliberations have the touch of a
conversation rather than that of a public speech. Some women indeed stated that it is rather the size of a village meeting that frightens them and makes them remain silent, than the fact that there are men present.

Ideas on leadership

When talking with people on leadership, it is frequently stressed that the ideal leader should not be an authoritative person with personal aspirations for power. Leadership does not seem to correspond to the idea of a ‘strong hand’ leading his or her flock of followers along a path unilaterally chosen. Instead the prevailing image of an ideal leader, is one of a ‘facilitator’, helping the group to arrive at the best decisions by mediating when conflicts arise, by listening to the ideas of the different members and by being able to rightly judge good and bad suggestions. The impression the informants’ remarks give, is that the leading figures are there to serve the members of the group, and not the other way around. Modesty was put forward as one important feature of a good leader, but at the same time s/he has to be able to act firmly when problems arise.

Women and men alike say they see no difference between male and female leaders, since both are considered capable of being in charge of a group if they have the right mentality and talents. Yet, some women and men pointed out that men might make better leaders anyway, because they will not be disturbed by the fact of having to take care of small children or the many domestic tasks of a woman. No man claimed that women as such would make bad leaders, but concerning village functions, some said that most women could not take on such a position because of lack of confidence and experience. As stated by a male informant, "A woman healer would maybe dare to speak in front of the whole village, but not the normal women from our village". A few women, even though they stated that both men and women would make good leaders, said that they would still prefer a female leader of their group. The reason being that a man in charge can abuse his authority, and ignore the point of view of women simply on the basis of his sex. "If he is a fierce person he can simply cut
your words off and tell you to be silent", two women explained at two different occasions. "With a chairwoman this would not be possible", one of them continued, since "she would have to come to terms with the group-members through discussion and mutual agreement".

In reality membership in a group often leads to disagreements, levying of fines and members or chairpersons being expelled from office for misbehaviour or unfitness. This is as true for women’s groups as for men’s groups. It is also a fact that men tend to monopolise the most important posts in the various associations, although most people claim that there are no differences in the abilities of the sexes. The women who do take leading roles in both mixed and female groups, are usually self-confident types and are known to be versatile, intelligent and good speakers by the group members who chose them. Men and women who lead groups are thus not necessarily representative of older or more mature community members, but people considered sensible and innovative. Some of the interviewed women holding important organisational posts were divorced and lived rather independently, while some others had husbands that gave them the freedom they needed. Though, the understanding between the spouses is still that the woman takes care of her household duties. A woman who dares to take public responsibility through an important post, does not necessarily act in the same way at home.

One major point of restraint on female leadership, brought forward on a number of occasions by both men and women, is the nursing of small children. Indeed, the majority of the women chairpersons consulted either had children who were old enough to be tended to by older children or could look after themselves. Women temporarily backed away from responsibilities in the group during a period after giving birth.

2.4. HESAWA roles and the establishment of Water User Groups (WUG’s)

The strong and weak points of contemporary groups must be seen in relation to the needs of HESAWA organisation and planning. First of all it has to be clear what kind of co-operation is envisaged. At the moment, and for the years to come, the focus of HESAWA’s work in the field will lie on
the establishment of WUG’s for wells installed, and specifically on the training of the group-committees that will organise and co-ordinate the necessary work and the economic contribution of the water users. During a week spent with the Ngudu HESAWA-team on their monitoring of WUG-training in Kwimba-district, observations were made on what the training entails and how it is received by the villagers. One of the things observed, was that the success of the whole package of WUG almost entirely depends on the training of trainers. That is, the teaching of local men and women to become WUG-educators. It is their understanding of the HESAWA concept and their ability to bring the important issues over to the villagers concerned which are crucial. If the project staff finds that educators have misunderstood the message or are not able to deliver the messages convincingly, it is necessary for HESAWA to intervene at an early stage either through re-education or replacement of the educator. Most of the issues found problematic at the time of the visit, however, were immediately reported to the officers in charge for a direct intervention and change of strategy where needed. But the main concern of this report is rather to explore the possibilities of incorporating features of local existing networking into the institutional set-up that will deal with the joint tasks of the Water User Group. First a few general remarks on the work for sustainability, and then some more practical comments on the work with WUG.

The paradox of sustainability: disruption and continuation

In the regions where the HESAWA programme is operating, in this case specifically Kwimba and Missungwi Districts, it is one of the most well known programmes amongst villagers, and generally people speak positively about its activities. This was my impression both when travelling with the HESAWA team in Kwimba district and also when previously staying in some Missungwi district villages in 1996-1997. This ‘familiarity’ with the work of the programme and the contacts built up between the villagers and the HESAWA field-staff, is a relation not to be underestimated for further work and for the sustainability of the activities. When a development project like HESAWA is entering a community and
starting co-operative work with the intention that these efforts will be sustainable and reproduced by the target-population, the attitude is often rather impersonal and ‘business-goal-oriented’. The idea is: phase in-inquire-intervene-phase out-reproduce (see for instance HESAWA Promotion Strategy 1995). However, on a personal level this means for most people an investment of personal ideas, dreams, emotions and efforts. When HESAWA now talks of ‘leaving’ or ‘phasing out’ this often evokes feelings of disbelief and disappointment amongst villagers. Why break up a relationship when it is good? Coping with the hard fact that the programme is going to phase out, at the same time as a motivation for project activities has to be nurtured, is one of the main paradoxes to be overcome by the villagers, as well as for the staff. Thus the message from the staff to the villagers sometimes becomes ambiguous. During meetings with the WUG’s, HESAWA staff make use of songs and slogan repetition in interaction with the group. For example the speaker calls: ‘HE’ and the group responds: ‘SAWA’, in Kiswahili meaning ‘ok’, creating a feeling of togetherness. At the same time the message given during the meeting is that HESAWA from now on has no responsibilities for the well anymore, and that the villagers have to sort things out for themselves. The impression is rather conflicting, and many probably do not know what to expect from the project in the future. At the same time as people may well understand that they are the owners and caretakers of their own well, many feel that the contacts with the HESAWA programme and staff have hardly been founded and a request for more support in the form of information and training is often heard in conversations with villagers.

Thus, ‘sustainability’ in development refers to the ability of the community to jointly continue the work initiated by the programme, while at the same time up-rooting the relations established with the staff. In the case of HESAWA, it may be of importance for sustainability that people do not feel abandoned, but that contact remains after the programme has phased out. Not so much for infrastructural support but rather for information and strategies to keep the WUG work-units motivated.
HESAWA is not presently making much use of the involvement and experience of people in local organisations. Excepting that the chairperson elected to the WUG-committee sometimes has posts in other groups too. During the training sessions however, no references are made to the workings and organisation of these local groups. The training in committee organisation are taught rather mechanically, not usually relating the textbook cases to real situations in the local setting. For instance, in the Luganda and other small groups it is common that the members are informed on their mutual investments and returns. Without transparency on these issues, suspicions would arise between the members and the group would be troubled by arguments, making co-operation difficult. Rules and punishments are therefore clearly stipulated and swiftly applied. In the training given to the WUG-committees, the focus of trust and 'transparency' was laid more on form than content. That is, the members were taught to fill in payment-receipts properly, but no discussion was held on the importance of trust between the water users and their committee. It would be better if such issues were broached and related to local examples.

Furthermore, the obligations people already have to different organisations are not taken into consideration when discussing the planning of work-schemes for the well. Certain periods of the year are more work-intensive qua farming and harvesting, so that a break to form a temporary cleaning unit for the well during this period could be experienced as untimely and disturbing. For these tasks, use could be made of the already existent work units, provided that these consist of neighbours or at least people living in the neighbourhood, meaning that they belong to the same WUG. A similar arrangement is proposed in Ledje's (1993:32) report on popular participation in the Tharaka Water and Sanitation Project in Kenya. To explain to the users that this is a possibility might be the task of the WUG-committees rather than that of the HESAWA staff. But before the committees have fully solved problems of local organisation, programme staff should be available to support local initiatives.

Concerning the sustainability of the local groups, we have seen that the most stable groups combine different tasks, not being dependent on one
issue only. For sustainability and motivation of the WUG’s and especially of the WUG-committee of 12 persons (6 men and 6 women) which is supposed to work without economic remuneration, HESAWA should make use of this experience. The work of the WUG is focussed on contributions for the maintenance of their well, something that for an individual water-user will be required at regular but infrequent intervals, and will consist of money and labour contributions. The WUG-committee on the other hand, will have to be active on a more frequent basis. Their tasks include collecting money, keeping the bank account, making work-schemes, making sure rules are followed, reporting misuse, repairing and keeping the pump protected etc. The assumption is that once started, things will jog along and the committee will learn from both mistakes and positive experiences as they go along. But it is possible that the first period after the withdrawal of HESAWA will be one of regular functioning of the wells, during which the committees may lose interest and motivation. Main concerns about water amongst the Sukuma is not the wells and drinking-water, but the erratic rains and the effect this has on the harvest. This is, for instance, mentioned by Brandström (1998) in his article WATER - Control of Resources or Involvement of People?, where he reports a conversation on the issue with some elder men.

A further problem is the possibility that the committee will feel that its tasks are too time-consuming without giving any reward. This is at least the opinion of the chairman of the collapsed voluntary HESAWA group (mentioned above) that only focussed on the communal benefits of keeping their well in repair. The fact that there was no individual gain involved was, according to him, one of the main reasons why the group failed. The same man added that this at least was so for the men of the group, saying that men have much less patience with these kinds of arrangements than women. "Women are used to take a lot, therefore they are more willing to perform such work without getting anything for it", he claimed. The truth of such a statement is contestable, but the issue of personal satisfaction in the work with WUG should be taken seriously. An arrangement with additional money generating activities for the benefit of the individuals in the committee is just one of many possibilities.
When asked by HESAWA staff how their WUG was planning to raise cash for future repairs and other costs of the pump, one group suggested starting their own Ifogong’ho credit scheme. This answer did not create much enthusiasm amongst the staff, as the assumption is that such an arrangement will not generate enough money. While not being entirely discouraging about the idea of starting an Ifogong’ho, the staff nevertheless tried to convince the group that additional charges to the users would be necessary. The idea of starting up an Ifogong'ho seems to be rather popular amongst the villagers at the moment. Several of the church-groups interviewed had, or were planning to launch their own credit scheme to generate money for their church. As the potential for this kind of money-saving activity is not fully known, either to HESAWA or to the villagers, it would be useful for HESAWA to encourage the villagers to find out more about how much money their credit schemes could generate, rather than assuming that it would not be enough. Clearly there are benefits in such schemes or they would not be spreading so rapidly. It is true that they require a minimum of effort from the members, and so it is a rather convenient way of collecting money, wherefore its appeal to the groups. In her study *Seeking shade* (1996), Terese Olsson gives an account of the usage and functioning of some Ifogong’ho groups in Mwabulenga village in Magu district, but no special attention is given to the real amounts lent, borrowed and generated. A study of borrowing patterns (Which individuals borrow the most? Are there individuals/families that never take a loan?), individual reasons for making use of the loan, real amounts of money lent and generated, might therefore be useful. It is doubtful whether the people who run the schemes keep statistics of how many people make use of the Ifogong’ho on a monthly and yearly basis. These kinds of village initiatives need to be encouraged, and if they prove to work, may provide not only economic support to village communities, but also a strong binding agent for HESAWA to the local context. If Ifogong’ho schemes are insufficient to maintain the well, other or additional solutions will have to be sought by the WUG’s.
Women's roles and participation in a sustainable development

Women are clearly not just passive and oppressed members of Sukuma society, even though men play many of the leading and visible roles in public life. Men also tend to command the attention of interventions and research into these communities, something that has undoubtedly struck many researchers. Still, HESAWA could make more use of local female assets. First of all through consulting ‘strong individuals’, and secondly by adapting some of its activities to the ways that women usually go about their daily duties.

Women who dare to speak their mind in public do exist, and it cannot be emphasised enough how important such key-persons can be for a community and as a role model for women. Men are naturally also important as key figures in terms of community initiatives. During the time spent in the field, I encountered several such ‘strong’ women and men who by being active and taking initiative had influenced others. While conducting a water-point analysis in Wanzamiso village for example, I noticed, that almost ninety percent of the individuals fetching water made use of a funnel to lead the water into the containers. I made a special note that the users of this pump seemed to have a great sense of responsibility.

Later in the afternoon I fell into conversation with a woman walking by, who turned out to live in the neighbouring village of Mamaye, but who at times fetched water at this well, since the one in her neighbourhood dried up during parts of the year. She was very conscious of the limited amount of water in the area, and explained to me that she had taught people to use a funnel in order not to waste so much of it. "Before it was terrible", she said, "people did not care at all, but I told them that if we do not watch out, this well too might run short of water". She was persistent, and came to the well every day for three weeks to tell people to use the funnel, with the result that the overwhelming majority now does so.

This is just one example where a motivated individual can cause substantial and immediate change of habits. Another example is one woman in Manawa village who has had such success with her women’s group, that not only other women but also men have expressed their wish to start up similar activities. That certain persons can inspire and set examples
is important. The prerequisite for the success and popularity of these individuals, though, is that they keep a modest demure and maintain a good social network in their community, just as the success of the chairpersons of many groups depends on these same levelling down features. These women seem to be generally more active than others in community related issues and it is not uncommon that they are involved in more than one project in the area. The opportunity for HESAWA to make use of such local ability would be invaluable for the spreading of messages on for instance water related health issues, sanitation and women’s empowerment. The HESAWA initiative to help women’s groups is good, but only for the women’s own circle since the knowledge is not spread further. Somebody who is genuinely concerned with the community could probably have a bigger impact. To find these key people is not an easy task, but considering the knowledge of the villages and their inhabitants that the field-staff possess, this should not be unfeasible.

On the issue of ‘gender’ in HESAWA activities, the message is rather unidirectional, i.e. the ideas of the programme are being put forward to the villagers through seminar materials, training and through implementing a 50% quota in committees and work-groups etc. But little information about the local women's situation is consciously being used in project policy and practice. This remark is not made with the intention of questioning the competence of HESAWA personnel. Programme staff know all the facts they need to know on issues related to gender, and the programme is on certain points adapting its practices to the local context. Nevertheless, an explicit attempt to adapt a gender strategy to the facts of life in the villages is not apparent. The focus of the gender strategy is rather on ‘women’s emancipation’, although, as mentioned, this is not always put into practice. In the work with WUGs, for instance, the impression gathered from staff before I had seen any of the training activities, was that a lot of effort was being made to balance the number of men and women involved in HESAWA work. It is true that on the first-day-meeting of a WUG, attended to in the Isadukilo sub-village of Kinoja village, women attended in nearly the same numbers as the men. Initially only a few old men were waiting under the tree where the meeting was to be held, but
slowly the shady spots were taken, counting 24 women and 29 men. This particular pump had 45 families amongst its users, so one would assume that almost every family was being represented by the people present, although far from the whole group of users were there.

Even though rather equal in numbers, the forum for the meeting was not any different from other village assemblies I have attended. This was surprising, since I had been told that HESAWA was trying to break with the usual ‘meeting habits’ by for instance creating a mixed sitting pattern. The next day it became clear that this strategy was implemented in the smaller WUG-committee sessions, but was not intended for the big initial assembly. While in the beginning addressing both the men and the women, the two male WUG-trainers leading the meeting after a while turned most of their attention to the men. Especially economic questions and contributions were only discussed by the male audience. At a certain moment most women completely lost interest and sat chatting quietly with each other on other topics. Still, I could observe that the trainers were aware of the uneven attention, since they sometimes turned to the female side with direct questions and requests for opinions. These were often met by little or no response from the women.

Clearly this kind of meeting, where villagers have to raise their hand and demand speak before a large group, benefits men, who are used to making decisions in this type of setting. This observation is also made in Helander’s (1992) study on Washing Slabs within the HESAWA programme. If this is the way meetings always are conducted, whether they are village meetings, HESAWA meetings or meetings of the water users, it will be difficult to motivate women to drop their other responsibilities and to attend HESAWA or other project assemblies. The meeting-forum is one that does not take into account the way women would go about their own daily activities and make their own decisions. It is not clear whether there is an experimental past of HESAWA meeting-forums, but to have more access to the opinions of the women (most do have opinions) the usage of new modes of communication might certainly prove more successful than compelling the women to participate on the men's terms. Similar remarks
can be found in Zwarteveen’s paper *Linking women to the main canal* (1995:10).

In this study women mainly have contributed with information on their work in different groups in Kwimba and Missungwi districts. The majority of these women are in some way active in group-related work, where decisions have to be taken on a daily and weekly basis, and sustainability is a question of the flexibility of the group and its members. In order to transpose this female engagement to the HESAWA project activities, two things are necessary. Firstly, that the women can express themselves freely as they do within their own small working units. Secondly, that for both women and men the time invested in ‘community work’ is experienced as rewarding in one or another way.

2.5. Recommendations

This paper advocates making use of local knowledge, organisational forms and institutions to reach the aims of the HESAWA programme. Hence the concluding recommendations attempt to narrow down the main observations to a few operational proposals.

a) In the light of the evidence seen of 1) economic satisfaction and 2) self-help activities as mainsprings for involvement in group-related work, it is essential for the future sustainability of the WUG-committees that ways are sought for a rewarding engagement for the committee members. Without motivation, involvement might not be sustainable.

1) On the level of *economic remuneration*, the experiences of former HESAWA work-units show that non-profitable community work can be maintained for a while, but over time, and especially in adverse circumstances, disintegration of the group is likely. However, when a remunerative solution is sought, it is of importance that the economic reward is not collected from the Water Users themselves, who often feel they are already burdened enough by fees and taxes from the authorities. Money should rather be generated by some other activity jointly performed by the committee.
2) As other forms of mutual assistance serve as a motivation for joint work and are proven to support group cohesion, the combination of well-activities with some self-help activity is strongly advised. It might serve as a focal point during times when little is happening around the pump, or when the community is more concerned with other, more pressing issues. The most sustainable of the local networks are characterised by their multifunctionality as they are not dependent on one single issue only but usually combine mutual help with money generating activities. The task of only keeping the pumps in good condition has previously proven a too weak an incentive to motivate sustainable activity.

b) In order to make better use of local potential it is important to nurture the interest within the HESAWA programme of stimulating local initiatives and ideas. For instance, the issue of Ifogong’ho as a means of collecting money for the WUGs deserves serious attention and study. Investigations on borrowing-behaviour and actual sums of money circulated and generated on a monthly and yearly basis could bring some light on the issue. Thus clarifying whether it would be feasible to fund WUG activities in this way, or whether it would be necessary to raise additional money by other means.

c) It is equally important that HESAWA makes more efficient use of its own capital of socio-cultural knowledge to better respond to the local situation. In order to make systematic use of the knowledge the staff holds on issues of gender, local groups, division of labour, attitudes towards the project and its different activities, it is important that the field-workers and staff in charge of planning analyse the available material. In some instances the programme policies and general assumptions may have to be discussed and reconsidered. The balance between introducing new ideas and organisational forms, and making use of local knowledge and institutions in development work can be difficult to achieve. Working out a basis for action on these issues is essential. Some questions that serve the purpose of building up such a basis are: Which are the local groups in the region? Who is participating? How are the groups organised, and which of them could be
useful in programme activities? How could these groups be useful in the programme? What does a ‘gender sensitive approach’ actually mean within HESAWA? Where/when does the programme intend to change local customs and introduce new concepts (i.e. when does the gender sensitive approach imply adaptation of the local situation to the programme’s ideals of, for instance, equality)? Where/when is HESAWA making use of local forms and ideas for implementing activities (i.e. when does the gender sensitive approach mean the adaptation of programme policies and activities to the local facts of life)? How do these two different approaches to ‘gender sensitivity’ function together with the quest for sustainability of the programme?

d) On the issue of women’s possibilities to express themselves within the frame of programme activities, there is a need for alternative methods to get women’s opinions. There are women who freely speak their mind in public and many women have certainly benefited from HESAWA initiatives intended to enhance women’s self esteem and assertiveness. However, most women never dare to speak out in public and many do not find it rewarding enough to even attend the HESAWA meetings. It is therefore recommended that other meeting forums be utilised. The recommendation is not to give up the goals of ‘gender equality’ and ‘women’s empowerment’, but rather for the programme to adopt a more aware and flexible ‘gender sensitivity’ approach, making use of the local facts of life when appropriate, and suggesting external solutions when appropriate.
3. Analysis of the study against the theoretical material presented

Considering the material presented in the first part of the paper, I now want to return to the report above for a closer look at some of the concepts used. I start with the HESAWA views on gender, equality, empowerment and agency as presented in the report. Subsequently, I look closer at my own treatment of the same concepts in the report, as well as what consequences this treatment has for my view on women’s subordination, agency, affiliation with ‘tradition’ and their relation to sustainability and changing society.

**Analysis of the HESAWA use and definition of ‘gender’ and related issues**

An analysis of the way HESAWA defines and uses ‘gender’ and related concepts will here have to be based on the statements made by the HESAWA staff, and on their way of working in the field with the water user groups, since no written policy texts are thoroughly presented or quoted in the study.

In view of the material presented in the first section, and according to the situation presented in the report, then, gender in the HESAWA programme can be said to be closely intertwined with the quest for equality between men and women. Gender, as stated by one staff member, is opposed to biological ‘sex’ and is perceived as the social roles men and women are ascribed in society.

The starting point of the HESAWA gender strategy is that power asymmetry dictates the gendered roles of Sukuma men and women. This asymmetry is seemingly attached to women’s boundedness to the domestic sphere and all the chores that go with it, and men’s privileged status seems attached to decision making in the public sphere. The ‘domestic’ space must in this view be associated with denigrating sentiments, and there can be no ground for stressing complementarity as an organising principle between men and women.

‘Empowerment’ of the women is therefore a necessary aspect of the gender sensitive implementation of the programme. This is done by
informing both men and women on what gender means, as well as on the ‘real’ sexual injustices in the society. It is hoped and believed that education will change the doings and thinking of men and women. Empowerment of the women is closely linked to ‘having a voice’ in social matters, but also to the relief of women’s work-load by changing the gendered division of labour.

‘Equality’ is not seen as ‘sameness’, as stated by one staff member informant, as it is not viewed as feasible within the programme. Yet many of the activities in the work with starting up WUG’s are meant to create a situation where men do ‘women’s work’ and women do ‘men’s work’. Also, the gender strategy for reaching ‘equality’ seems to focus on obvious ‘physical’ situations, like implementing a 50/50 quota in committees, teacher-trainings and the like, instead of focussing on strategic needs that are more difficult to identify.

‘Women’, like ‘men’ are not generally problematised concepts, as a strategy that approaches different women differently cannot be discerned. The population of the area under study can in a way be viewed as rather homogenous, but that does not mean that there are no differences between groups of women or individuals. Age, church affiliation, language (sukuma/swahili/english/other), education or economic status, are some examples of social differentiation of individual women and men. What this means in the rural communities in the relation to HESAWA is not stated anywhere in programme documents or in the working manner of the teams in the field. ‘Gender’ therefore seems to be worked out on the premise that all persons addressed are either ‘men’ or ‘women’, and nothing else.

Women’s and men’s active engagement in HESAWA activities is seen to be different. The problems perceived in relation to the difficulty of engaging women in project practice are mainly ascribed to the local gendered division of labour, where women have less time at their disposal than men. At surface level this does not mean that women are viewed to be somehow more passive as opposed to the more active men, it is just the ‘state of affairs’. But if one scrutinises the underlying assumptions, this implies a view where social structures dominate and rule the personal lives of individuals, who are either too weak to change, or simply do not ‘see’
the problem of the situation in which they are living. Individuals are thus not ascribed much agency in themselves, but are seen as victims of ‘customs’ or ‘tradition’. ‘Agency’ is a problematic concept in relation to development work anyhow, since any intervening action on the part of the donor brings with it a certain degree of passivity on the part of the recipients.

Analysis of the anthropological use of gendered analysis

From statements made in the text, an initial conclusion as to the author’s understanding of ‘gender’ would be that it is closely associated with questions concerning women. Even though both men and women are seen to be making up the gendered relations in society, in the specific setting of ‘development’ it is the women’s views, opinions and actions in daily life that are approached. Women’s situation is perceived to be less known than men’s in the project, and a gender analysis is thought to change that. Therefore, also the author must be said to define a ‘gender approach’ as one that wants to enhance women’s say in society.

Thereby women must also be seen to be subordinated men in the communities under study. It can be understood from the description of different situations and places where women act in different manners, that the author aims at giving a picture of men and women operating in complementarity, or at least at showing that subordination of women is not a permanent state. The focus is on men’s and women’s roles and not on the symbolic representations of ‘men and ‘women’, what they ‘are like’ and what they stand for. By the description of these roles and the positions analysed for different social interaction, women’s doings can be said to take place in more informal structures, away from the public arena of the whole village. ‘Agency’ is thus perceived to be less formal, more hidden and personal with women than with men.

Understanding ‘gender’ in development as an approach by which women are specifically targeted, as their situations and views are not known or taken into account, brings with it that women are perceived to need ‘empowerment’ – although the term is not specifically mentioned in the report. The author’s view is that ‘gender sensitivity’ in development
can be interpreted as learning from the local gendered reality and adapting the programme to that. This is contrasted with the HESAWA view of ‘gender sensitivity’ which means that the taken for granted, unequal situation between men and women is counterbalanced with equalising measures. However, by wanting to enhance women’s say, thereby seeing women as subordinated to men in daily life, as stated above, the conclusion must be that the author, like HESAWA, advocates empowerment of the women. ‘Empowerment’ might comprise many things, though, as stated in the first section of this study. Here, empowerment of women seems on the one hand to entail a change of the situation whereby women’s opinions are heard in the HESAWA meetings, and that the work done by women is recognised in society. On the other hand empowerment also seems to be linked with the local reality, the way things are done and how decisions are made by the local women. Adapting some of the programme’s strategies to the described situation is seen to empower the women to take part in the programme activities in a more ‘equal’ and effective way.

While women are seen to act in different ways in different settings or spheres of interaction, little differentiation is made between women’s backgrounds and specific realities, that is between what distinguishes women from each other. Reference is made to women’s varying situations, whether married, divorced, elder, mothers etc, in relation to for instance leadership, but what these situations mean socially and how it makes women’s perspectives on their own situation and project activities differ, is not analysed. In general, like in the HESAWA approach, ‘women’ can be said to be addressed as a category opposed to ‘men’. This also means that ‘gender’ is defined as based on the biological differences between ‘fixed binary sexes’, and that the ‘body’ of gendered individuals is left out of the analysis. It is true that such discourse is interesting and may feel justifiable on a theoretical level, but it can be very difficult to apply in a real life situation except in such cases where the body itself really is under scrutiny, like in Lundgren & Kroon’s (1996) case with transsexuals.

Sustainability is by the author understood differently, in relation to the programme of HESAWA, than the definition given in the Brundtland commission. While in the Brundtland definition the focus is on
development that does not compromise the future of coming generations in an environmental sense, the understanding here is of development efforts that are viable and self-sustaining in the local setting once the donor has pulled out of the area. This is not clearly stated in the report, wherefore it might confuse the reader in certain aspects. One such aspect is, that if the author is understood to define ‘sustainability’ as in the Brundtland report, then the connection between women, local knowledge and environmental soundness would look suspiciously ‘taken for granted’ and reified in the sense that Braidotti (1997) and Wade (1999) warn against.

Women are identified to somehow act differently and to be affected in different ways than men in relation to changing society. It is noted that women in the study areas seem more prone to ‘modern’ living than men, who prefer to invest in ‘traditional’ cattle. Changing gendered division of labour and attitudes to ‘what men and women are like’ and ‘what they can do’ have in many ways benefited women more than men, even though men more commonly annex new commodities, like the bike. Women cannot be said to be ascribed a more ‘traditional’ role based on the description in the report, but they can also not be seen to ‘mediate’ between perceived ‘global’/’modern’ influences and ‘local’/‘traditional’ ones. As women are described to be more ‘invisible’ in development, this perception could be related to the notion of women’s agency as more informal and ‘hidden’. In a sense then, like in Weiner’s (1988) reasoning on Trobriand women’s banana leaf exchange, women would be closer connected with ‘tradition’ as their spheres are not ‘affected’ to the same extent as the men’s. The view implies more passivity on the side of women though, as escaping ‘change’ is only a matter of ‘not being noticed’ by the intervening donor.

Gender analysis is not an easy task. More often than not will the researcher find her/himself trapped by her/his own reasoning. In the report presented, the author has avoided any discussion of power, authority and representation, as the own self is not questioned. The discourse of gender is in itself infested with power-relations, perceived or real asymmetries, defining subjects and defined objects, representations of self and others. When adding a development discourse on top of it, imbued as it is with the
relations between colonised and coloniser, even the best of anthropological intentions can quickly be turned against the researcher. In this specific case the anthropological self might be seen as a kind of ‘broker’, as described by Filer (1999), intending to ‘empower’ the community under study merely by giving advice. The alignment with the donor is obvious though, as the intention is to ensure a viable continuation of the programme by facilitating the engagement with the local communities. At the same time a ‘cause’ of the local women is being fended for, but this is actually only motivated by the fact that the intervening donor wants to change practices on their own terms. The anthropologist, and often also anthropology, is entangled as the motives, initially thought to be clear, turn out to be almost the opposite of what was intended.
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