DOMESTICATION RECONSIDERED:
Towards a New Dialogue between
Women-Oriented Aid and Feminist Research

Vigdis Broch-Due

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DEVELOPERS AND RESEARCHERS- AN AWKWARD RELATIONSHIP

Generally speaking, social scientists have only recently been invited to contribute to aid projects, and when invited they tend to produce knowledge which is either wrongly timed or ill-conceived, and is therefore of limited practical value for planning. This lack of impact is not surprising considering the services they are commonly asked to offer:

1. Project evaluations, which is the fruit of studies presented as a set of warnings after the event, which have little effect for two reasons. Firstly, it is at this stage too late to correct the project. Secondly, since nobody likes to be confronted with their own failure, such reports are not the favourite read among development workers. The reports are often filed away and general lessons for the future are seldom learnt.

2. Consultancies, which may be done more in the forefront of events, but where researchers are seldom allowed the time necessary to enable the to speak with any real authority and knowledge. Consultants are therefore forced to take short-cuts, sometimes to the extent that previous reports are used as ‘blueprints’ and bits and pieces of new information are added and old ones are removed. Others who are more scrupulous who sincerely seek to address the subject population on their own merits are still forced to tailor

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1. This article is a revised version of a paper presented in the workshop "Woman-Oriented Aid: a Challenge to Development Research?" at NORDIC FORUM, Oslo 1988. Chapter 12. From Sameness to Difference in Women's Lives: Some Suggestions for Improving the Relations between Women-Oriented Aid and Feminist Research.
their tools to the limited timetable given, which often means that simple surveys are chosen at the expense of more qualitative case studies and systems analysis. Yet the outcome is often fragmented and random information, on the basis of which the consultants feel obliged by the "terms of reference" to make sweeping generalisations for policy which in most cases are poorly justified by the evidence. This is the general state of affairs in development studies, including those concerned with "women in development". Chambers (1980) describes the situation in the following way:

One of the most inefficient industries in the world... and yet these huge operations persist, often in the name of science of evaluation, generating mounds of data and papers which are likely to be an embarrassment to all until white ants or paper-shredders clean things up.

To this we can add the inroad the enterprise makes both on the time of the writers and readers alike, and on scarce national funds for research and development assistance. Moreover, this state of affairs creates tension and uneasy relationships between planners and researchers. Development planners and workers tend to view researchers as being "bold in criticism, but feeble or misguided in advice". Researchers often feel that planners are arrogant and ignorant "aid pushers"; although they will of course never say this in public for fear of having their careers as consultants destroyed and thereby loose the opportunity to make easy money.

To improve the relationship would benefit all the actors involved, particularly those the whole enterprise is set up to assist; notably the subject population of each project. In my view this requires that both parties have to clean up their respective houses. Researchers must be more willing to spell out the exact nature of their competence, as well as where their competence ends. The core of such a self-reflective project is a willingness by social scientists to come to terms with their own theoretical and ideological "baggage" which heavily influences the advice they give to aid agencies. Rather than giving a "laundry list" containing specific research issues for "Women in Development", I will be concerned with research perspectives. I will use a large canvas and paint in broad strokes some weaknesses of the approach in studies of women, and thereby indicate how recent advances and theoretical insights in feminist research, concerning the differences in the construction of gender, can hopefully help us to improve the research component in the development enterprise.
WOMEN IN DEVELOPMENT

The concept "Women in Development" is a challenging and difficult topic to address. It combines two highly emotional and morally laden terms which confront us with sensitive areas of our own and others "model of the world". How we perceive ourselves as "women" and "men" is deeply rooted in our minds, even when new ideas and practices revise and challenge our gender experience. Although gender identity is culturally constructed on a biological base and therefore subject to great variation in time and across societies, most people tend to see their own specific versions of "femininity" and "masculinity", and how they form divisions of labour, resources and power between women and men, as natural and therefore universally shared. These variable sets of more or less "hard programmed" ideas and values heavily influence the way we, as western women, perceive women in other societies—often in contrast to how they perceive themselves and us.

Western women often view third world women as versions of themselves, having the same needs, problems and expectations in life. Yet since they often appear in the mass media and in the slogans of development policy as "dressed in traces", represented as poor, illiterate and depressed, we are inclined to locate them on a lower rung on the evolutionary ladder of mankind. In order "to push" them upwards we prescribe the same therapy which once worked to improve the oppressive situation of our western foremothers. Thus the historical experiences links up with our notion of "development" as a divine force, a steady progress from "bad" to "good". And, since "development" has a dimensions of welfare attached to it (at least in Scandinavia) the singling out of "women" and "the poor" as main "targets" and the linking of the two have a great appeal and rhetoric potential.

Thus, "the good" we define as appropriate for them is not the same as "the good" we aspire for ourselves in the contemporary western world. Rather we tend to link the situation of poor women in the third world to that of our grandmothers, who according to our traditions lived in a historical stage where social practice took place in separate male and female spheres. To use a metaphor: the "house" of our grandparents contained an internal division. "Upstairs" were the "men’s rooms" in which social relationships were dominated by production, circulation, politics, exchange and "culture". "Downstairs" was the "women’s rooms", characterised by nurture, child-rearing, affective values, reproduction, sharing and "nature". Needless to say, "upstairs" dominates "downstairs" in this conceptual scheme. Indeed, this division of genderised space was visible in the last century's architecture, at
least among the European middle class, e.g. the kitchen and nursery on the one hand and the smoking-room on the other.

It is this "downstairs" world we have exported in our aid baggage. We have of course offered to do some improvements. It is not grandmother's worn out kitchen we are exporting, but something in between hers and the kitchen of our mothers. Our aim is to plaster the walls, install water, provide more fire wood, etc. And to clear a "kitchen garden" where these women can cultivate some crops and raise chickens for subsistence and sale. To promote the scheme and make it more attractive and updated we have invented a brand—new label—notably, "home economics". We have also offered to train women to be proper housewives, by means of education and improving health facilities so that woman can take better care of young and old dependants in the household.

SOME PROBLEMS WITH WOMEN'S PROJECTS AND WOMEN'S GROUPS

To achieve these goals, aid agencies have encouraged women to form so-called women's groups, who are involved in small-scale income generating activities ranging from crop and livestock production and house improvement activities, to business and handicraft enterprises. For example, Scandinavian support to Kenyan women, up to now, has largely been in the form of setting up specific "projects for women" in the domestic sector, with "women's groups" as the major recipients and with funds allocated through NGO's and volunteers. Several recent evaluation reports have expressed rather critical views concerning the workings of women's groups. Countrywide, lack of management skills and funds have resulted in a situation where these business enterprises are run unprofessionally and with small returns (Business and Economic Research, 1984). The product mix consists of low-priced items and depends on unreliable and limited markets. What this policy, termed by Barbara Rogers as "the domestification of women", tends to accomplish is to push female producers into unreliable jobs of low productivity, thereby reducing the number of women competing with men for the more remunerative employment opportunities (Broch-Due, 1983). An additional weakness is that the majority of women, not members of such groups, tend to be caught between all kinds of aid programmes. The emphasis on special projects for women has put firm brakes on an alternative strategy of integrating women alongside men into the major and most remunerative
development projects, and rather caters to women's specific needs within each programme through proper supportive measures.

Thus large numbers of Kenyan women, whether they have chosen to stay outside or move in under the "aid umbrella" targeted towards women, have been caught in "poverty traps". Many women have been left to struggle on the margins; facing increasing work loads and diminishing return on labour and having little support and dwindling economic resources at their disposal to meet their multiple and variable activities and roles as parents, providers, producers, decision-makers, community members and citizens. The situation in contemporary Kenya, like the one in many third-world countries, is characterised by massive population growth and concentration; linked with increasing land pressures, land privatisation and landless segments, where the pockets of poverty are likely to expand rather than contract, and where the domestic terms of trade develops to the disadvantage of rural areas. To earn their living under such conditions, poor women are forced to be "jack of all trades" and exploit any opportunity, often of dubious legality, which presents itself. Let me give an example from the Turkana in Northwest Kenya, among whom I have done research for several years.

Among the pastoral Turkana aid agencies have introduced commercial irrigation agriculture and fishery to cater for paupers who, in increasing numbers and for various reasons, are being pushed out of the livestock economy and social system. On the contention that households, rather than individuals, are (or should be) the basic economic units, planners vested the bulk of new production factors in the hands of men, and in an amount suitable for nuclear families, in the belief that women would benefit from men's holdings. However, these western ideas run counter to the traditional set-up among the polygynous Turkana, where husbands and wives have their own pools of assets, and where the separate spheres of both can be interwoven by mutuality beneficial transactions. Lack of arrangements for wives and heirs, coupled with insufficient incomes, have altered the size and composition of domestic labour. The family control over adult male labour has been broken since so many young men are absent due to migrant labour. This has been followed by instability of the household in general and a rise in female-headed households in particular.

Turkana women have had to adapt to a new situation as settlers, unlike their male counterparts, without access to animals, farming, forests and fishery resources. They must also secure their own and their children's food in whatever way they can. Women figure prominently in the black market economy, flourishing in settlements and towns, where prostitution, beer
brewing, charcoal burning and petty trade are common, some of which are clearly illegal. Not only are these women, many of whom are single parents and providers, easy victims of police razzia where those caught are arrested, fined and harassed; they are also "thorns in the eyes" of the project personnel who seek to counteract deforestation in this precarious and arid environment. Charcoal production is clearly a wasteful process, but the women concerned can hardly be blamed. Women's work load, changes in consumption and housing patterns, and the shortage of alternative commodities for cash; all turns the exploitation of woody resources into crucial means of securing their economic viability. That the women's strategies run counter to resource conservation is an apt illustration of the spreading effects the neglect and misrepresentation of women's needs and situation can produce. (cf. Broch-Due, 1983 & 1986).

It is outside the scope of this paper to offer a detailed world wide account of aid assistance that defines "women" as "target groups". Suffice it to say that the Kenyan experience is not exceptional, and that the list of failures is longer than the list of successes. It is not necessarily the case that the public/domestic distinction is of no relevance in many societies, nor that specific projects for women may not be a good solution: Such traits should be investigated, not assumed.

However, in those communities which fit the conventional picture, by upgrading women's roles and resources as mothers and wives, homemakers and nurtures, we support women in meeting their obligations which are defined by oppressive and male dominated institutions. And, even worse, in those cases where this distinction was not particularly relevant in the first place, we tend to insert it through our assistance and thereby create new hierarchical relations of inequality between men and women. In such cases the challenge for many women may be "how to survive development", rather than "how to sustain development".

In the 1980s, there has been a growing realisation among researchers and planner alike that the sectorization of women under a domestic and household orientated policy have not been conducive to improving the situation and lines of women in aid recipient countries. There is now a greater awareness that concentrating development inputs aimed at women around caring and kinship roles (wives, mothers and daughters) and assistance aimed at men around occupational roles (farmers, fishermen, pastoralists and industrial workers etc.), creates and cements sex segregated activities. That women are not simply reproducers but also producers is now reflected in "the plans
of operations for women oriented aid" in all the Scandinavian aid organisations.

What is interesting to note, however, is that this shift and adjustment in policy resulted mainly from economic factors; it was forced through simply by the fact that many women's projects and groups collapsed and turned out to be economically and socially unviable, despite heavy investments of development funds. However, there have been warnings all along the way that something was amiss in our understanding of the problem, but we have turned a deaf ear to the critics, many of whom are women from recipient countries themselves. In all types of international conferences on WID, the same type of disagreement tend to pop up between women from the so-called "first" and "third" world. "They" are accusing "us" for being paternalistic and ethnocentric, insisting on our own definitions of women's "status" and "needs", while paying little heed to what they themselves have to say about their own opportunity situation, which of course varies according to the ethnic identity and social status of the speaker.

In our own struggle to be heard and secure an entrance "ticket" into the male dominated research and planning institutions in our own societies by insisting (and rightly so) that our experience as women make us significant contributors; we have silenced the voices of these "other women" whom we claim to represent, but whose experiences and world views may differ from our own. Planners, researchers and consultants (men and women) from the west have turned their counterparts in recipient countries into muted groups, and have made women (and men) on the receiving end of the aid pyramid into social clients rather than co-operating partners. It is high time we start to take this frustrated communication seriously and endeavour to unveil its causes.

Although aid agencies have broadened their outlook on women's activities, they have not yet started to question the concept of womanhood itself, and investigate how it is differently constructed, lived out and experienced in and across societies. Although the input components of WID are now more diverse, the underlying assumptions about "woman" as a uniform and essential entity world-wide are still lurking beneath the surface. To this we can add the confusion and conflation of women as a social category and a social group with an organisational structure based on female recruitment. These and similar misconceptions blur the understanding of gender relations and women's position in all societies, and vex our efforts to develop a more integrated strategy to improve women's situations.
FROM SAMENESS TO DIFFERENCE IN FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE ON WOMEN’S LIVES

How we perceive ourselves and others is part of a cultural competence which both maps the social landscape and provides instructions for moving and negotiating within it. That notions of "women" and "men", "femaleness" and "maleness" and others like "marriage", "family" and "household", are socially constructed and culturally defined, becomes apparent when we are confronted with completely different "world views" from our own. Indeed, all kind of development assistance constitutes such points of contact between them. In fact, it was the focus on culture and what difference culture makes to being a women (or man) that led feminist anthropologists away from the "study of women" to the "study of gender". However, the first phase was a necessary beginning and has fertilised the second phase.

The idea of sameness in women’s experience world-wide was initially linked to the biological fact that women bear and nurse babies, which men clearly do not. The theory in fashion in the 1960s was the motherhood dominates women’s lives, turns women into the "second sex", locks women into the domestic domain and bars women from taking part in production, making politics and shaping culture. In western societies, the categories "woman" merge and are clearly intermeshed with ideas about marriage, family, the home, children and work. When female anthropologists set out to investigate this nexus in other cultural settings, they found that the conceptual linkages between "woman" and "mother" was not as "natural" as it may first appear. Moreover, they found that the binary opposition between "domestic" and "public" was neither a universal fact, nor was it, when relevant, always gender specific. When these stitches were dropped, the whole piece of knitting dissolved. Feminist researchers had to dismantle the model of the unitary sociological category "woman" and by implication, that a unitary woman’s "world view" could exist. It follows that statements like "the position of women" and "the subordination of women" are analytically sterile when applied universally. Furthermore—and probably the most provocative insight—these findings made it difficult to argue, on logical grounds, that female researchers occupied a natural and privileged position in studying other women (although in practice they may, simply because female scholars have taken a more seriously interest in the topic than males and, by virtue of their qualifications, often have better merits). In fact, the position "it-takes-one-to-know-one" would render most kinds of research impossible and undermine the whole comparative project on which anthropology is
founded. Taken to the extreme, it would make meaningless any efforts to communicate globally, a discouraging prospect for the future of mankind indeed. (Confer H. Moore [1988] who brilliantly examines the history and development of a feminist critique in anthropology).

Feminist anthropologists have now turned their attention towards the construction of gender and gender differences, where "relationships" and "contexts" are key words. To state the obvious, if we seek to understand how the relations between men and women are variously shaped and reshaped in any given society, we need to know more about their respective views. This is because culture is not necessarily consensus and equally shared, but consist of sets of negotiated and contested positions, which are contained within the overall cultural framework and bring about change.

Men's and women's positions in a network of relations and relationships, varies from one context and group to another as well as throughout the lifecycle. The management of relationships can lead to resources, privileges, statuses and power being granted or withheld. By tracing such bundles of relationships and relations in terms of flows of labour, services, goods and better picture also of the relative imbalances or balances of transfers across gender, socio-economic groups and "sectors" on both micro and macro levels. To make the assumption behind the difference positions clearer and more relevant to the topic of development assistance, I will use it in a critique against the conventional "target group" thinking.

The two target groups that interest us here are either defined according to biological sex or to poverty. It assumes that the category ("natural" or "statistical") of people identified according to a or set of indicators make up a bounded social group, whom one can reach directly with project inputs. Real life is however far more complex and chaotic. The individuals who have been put in the target group "box" are in most societies tied by a nexus of relationships to individuals not included in the statistically defined "target group". It is the claims, rights and obligations these criss-crossing relationships imply which channel socio-economic interaction with the conflict and co-operation involved. The moves of the "losers" (poor men and women) and the counter moves of the "winners" (prosperous men and women) will determine the ability for the poor (and/or women) to pursue strategies which threaten the interest of the prosperous (and/or men). The better such "games" are understood, the better the chance is of finding key entry points for aid investment which can change the poverty producing process in desired direction, or increase the options so that women can advance their own interests etc. This may help to identify what is possible to achieve by means of aid support, and

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what can only be achieved through other means, for instance politics. Let us continue the Turkana case.

In their well-intended efforts to benefit the poor, aid agencies have created artificial and bounded worlds, populated with the bottom of the pastoral group. It is by virtue of their being destitute that persons are in their well-intended efforts to benefit the poor, aid agencies have provided with productive means, such as tenancies, fishing gear and boats, and credit. Since people are not pushed out of pastoralism randomly, the scheme populations have a high proportion of consumers to producers, and a more narrow selection of social categories and status sets than their pastoral counterparts. An unfortunate combination of demographic, social and economic dynamics has turned these modern sectors into poverty traps. Social relationships and institutions have been eroded. Firstly, there is an absence of suitable people to occupy all positions needed, be it the necessary circle of kin to negotiate marriages, or the matching sets of senior and junior age groups needed to work the generation system. Secondly, there is a general shortage of livestock to bind relationships and provide subsistence. Since livestock, which represent the linkage between individuals and groups, are no longer available in sufficient numbers to fulfils such functions, partnership, kinship and marital alliances cannot be maintained. This strikes the cultural core of society, notably the relationship between spouses. A general absence of culturally recognised marriage ties, and thus father-child bonds, means that descent is drained of content. The adjustments in domestic relations do not only adversely affect the social and economic careers of women, but also those of men.

Concubinage in a settled context puts brakes on the community of labour between the two genders. Among the nomads, the productive and social contributions of both are rewarded with shares in herds. Among the settlers, the need to husband scarce assets, combined with an absence of marital ties, decreases the transfers between spouses-and thus the very motivation to cooperate. This creates a vicious circle and spreads into other social fields. Each individual strives to scrap together a meagre income, while the gain for each could have been multiplied if households had managed to co-ordinate members and activities around a common goal. Viable economic and social enterprises are difficult to build as social networks contract. Success in commercialised fishing and farming demands the active and orderly participation of crew members linked to a boat, or farmers linked to the same irrigation canal. However, since the standards and values to mobilise people are tied to the circulation of livestock, the principles and capacities the pastoral society commands for organising individuals for common action are now
dissolved. In turn, problems of co-operation put ceilings on the exploitation of resources in these sectors below the full production potential. One implication is that nomadic pastoralism becomes a closed career as farmers and fisherfolks are also at stake, forcing some back to famine relief, which means that they are now back where they started two decades ago.

The roots to these problems lay in the changes in ownership patterns with sedentarization and market integration. Nomads hold animals as common property, which is not attached unequivocally to specific individuals, and which weaves men and women into wider circles of interdependency. Both the content and development of social relations are linked to stock transfers, and it is the movement of large numbers of stock along several paths that provides the framework for Turkana society. Lack of stock due to low productivity in farming and fishery, and stock held in private farming and fishery, and stock held in private ownership among the settlers changes social institutions. The changes in property relations are interwoven with an evolving modern prestige system, which rests on the acquisition of other goods. Livestock savings are foremost regarded as a means to obtain production inputs such as fishing tackle, seeds and fertilisers. The few who have any means left strive to acquire clothing, crockery, watches and radios. Settlers cannot afford to obtain livestock in sufficient numbers to open traditional avenues of social investment and are therefore increasingly divorced from the pastoral society. There is thus a marked tendency towards a dual economy, since a free market for investments outside pastoralism is still poorly developed. Since the possibility to transfer capital from animals to land or boats is thwarted, nomads retain their wealth in herds. Nomads, fishermen and farmers each operate today with footholds in separate systems, each organised by different property and social relations. (cf. Broch-Due, 1983, 1986 and 1987)

The Turkana case is an apt illustration, showing where projects fail of heir purpose because the circumstances have been misunderstood. The initial choice to neglect herding, the occupation for the majority of people, was based on an erroneous assumption that herdsmen are prone to overstock and cause desertification. Two decades later, signs of overgrazing are found around settlements and project areas, while the nomadic range could support more livestock. Paradoxically, aid activities have created the very "tragedy of the commons" situations which they started out to alleviate. Herds in Turkana are not only food, but the medium through which social relationships are created, cemented or cancelled, and through which identity and community values are expressed and maintained. When livestock were
removed from the arena, the social relations in their composite of gender, age, positions, kinship and network ties just collapsed. One among other discouraging trends in this "development" process is that the strong position held by Turkana pastoral women is declining.

SOME INSTITUTIONAL PROBLEMS OF CHANGING THE POLICY OF WID

It would be quite unfair and entirely wrong to blame development planners for all breaches in policy and understanding of women's issues world-wide. In fact, it was the community of development researchers themselves who, in the sixties and early seventies, were advocates of the viewpoint that the experience of women was essentially the same, both throughout history and across societies and cultures. To put the record straight, it is important to recall that feminist research, development studies and development assistance were all borne of the same broad political movements in western societies in the sixties, and are closely interwoven since the two former serve as suppliers of premises and knowledge to the latter. But unlike those researchers who worked to integrate findings and insights from several decades of sustained basic research in economics, ecology, politics, etc., researchers concerned with the position of women did not have an established "research capital" to draw on when asked to contribute in "developing" other women. Thus, what was initially a working hypothesis based on western experience—namely, "we believe that women universally are subordinated"—was immaturesly concretised and conflated as stemming from empirical facts.

Hopefully we are wiser in the late 1980s. Cumulative research on non-European societies, both empirically and theoretically, has shown us that gender identity and gender relations are differently conceived in and across cultures. For example, one comparative (non-field work) study concluded as follows:

We do not find a pattern of universal male dominance, but much variations from culture to culture in virtually all aspects of the positions of women relative to men. Our findings do lead us to doubt that there are cultures in which women are totally dominant over men. Rather, there is substantial variations from societies with very general male dominance to other societies in which broad equally and even some specific types of female dominance over men exist. The whole notion of assuming universal male dominance and then looking for universal explanations for that dubious assumption seems to us an unproductive enterprise (Whyte 1978:167-68).
Such findings have contested many of our prior concepts in women's studies and have forced feminist researchers to revise, refine and add complexity to their models.

However, it has proved remarkably difficult to replace "worn-out" knowledge with updated knowledge in international development organisations (or among male researchers for that sake). There are several reasons for this time lag between the "state of art" in feminist research and the "state of art" in women oriented aid. The most apparent is that female researchers, planners and politicians have had to fight many battles against their male counterparts just to get women included on the list of aid recipients. It is therefore quite understandable that those who have invested so much time, effort and rhetoric (often at the expense of their own career prospects) to drive the message home, that in why and how women should get a piece of the aid cake; that many women (and some men) are quite reluctant to present a new version of the whole problem, and thereby start the negotiation process afresh. Neither should one disregard the political fact that women oriented aid is precarious and therefore to put old assumptions under attack could (if one is not careful) easily "throw out the baby with the bath water".

Another and probably more constraining factor concerns the organisational set up. The situation given to us "outsiders" by the "insiders" in the Scandinavian aid agencies, is one marked by shortage and high turn over of staff in general and lack of expertise in social sciences in particular; where funds from parliaments continue to increase, and where tight budgetary and administrative procedures add to make the "pipeline syndrome" complete. Those officials who manage to spend the most money in shortest time, whether through the internal system or by "leasing" out money and project tasks to commercial consultant firms and charity organisations, come out as "winners" with the best prospects to make careers. This "exotic" scenario of the aid industry can be doubled or tripled to include the bureaucratic structures on national, regional and local levels in the recipient countries.

It is therefore no surprise that a policy based on the principle of sameness in women's lives will stand a better chance of getting inside and staying in the memory of aid agents, than the alternative policy which stresses differences between women's lives. This is simply because the sameness strategy fits both the required standardisation of inputs, and the sectorial division of aid in which a "woman's" component can be added to programmes in health, education, water, agriculture etc. In contrast, the difference strategy seeks to approach each and every subject population in their own terms and would divert inputs according to an understanding of linkages and interrelation-
ships across the lines of gender, groups and sectors. To make aid work according to the latter model would be more consuming in terms of time, staff and skills on all levels, but it is less consuming in terms of funds and requires a total reorganisation; which, taken together, runs counter to the culture of aid agencies.

For many of the same reasons, the sameness position is more widely held by those consultants who earn a living from WID. Like all consultants who have carved out a professional "niche" as travellers in "social engineering", they are typically divorced from the recent debates in their own disciplines, and are forced both to economise with their time and to deliver a product which satisfies the aid contractors. The difference position, on the other hand, is more in fashion among feminist scholars with a foothold in basic research and who are less vulnerable to the demands on the aid market. So far so good; one could say that the present state of affairs suits everybody, was it not for two crucial points. Firstly, the whole aid industry was set up to assist and run on behalf of women and men on the grassroots level in the recipient countries, and not to assist planners, researchers and consultants in making their jobs easier and promote their careers. Secondly, if we agree that this overall goal should continue to be our major concern, it follows that the analytical approach applied must be selected according to how far it can help us to understand real life situation and thereby intervening in appropriate ways, and help them to make a better living according to their own standards.

SAMENESS AND DIFFERENCE REVISED: TOWARDS A NEW APPROACH IN FEMINIST RESEARCH

What is promising in the state of affairs in feminist anthropology and its visions for the future, is the insistence upon the necessity for an interdisciplinary approach and for research co-operation between researchers in the donor and recipient countries, to advance out understanding of gender differences and the differences gender make. This may come as a great relief to planners and researchers, not part of the "clan", who rightly stress that there are neglected other than those pertaining to studying "the oddities and exotics of the local life of the Bongo Bongo". This is of course a stereotype which neither fits anthropology in general, nor the Scandinavian contributors who have focused on the "hardware" components like ecology and economy and only recently have included the "software" components like symbolism. In fact, the core of anthropology has always been that cultural difference con-
cerns recognising uniqueness, while at the same time seeking out the similarities across cultures. Whatever the case, feminist anthropologist are now moving beyond the boundaries of the discipline. Rather than asking how gender is experienced and constructed through culture, they are turning the question around and asking how economics, kinship, politics, symbolism and so on, are experienced through gender. It has also gone on to ask how gender is experienced and structured through class, ethnicity, race, colonialism, market economy and interventions of the state and international aid agencies. (Moore, 1988).

In turn, these theoretical questions have forced a critical rethinking not only of the concept of sameness, but also of the concept of difference. If we take a close look at the effects of modernisation on women’s opportunities, what is striking is that quite apart from the great diversity of socio-cultural systems, environmental conditions, and the position of women prior to interventions, is the many similarities in women’s situation afterwards. The leading thread in reporting is that of an increasing marginalization of many women world-wide. Why and how this is so is the challenge for future research. To answer these questions, we have to pay more attention to macro factors, or rather to the intersections between micro and macro levels. Of course, many scholars in the social sciences and beyond are already engaged in such projects. However, what is still unmasked (or seldom posed as a serious research issue) is the manner in which gender lies beneath shifts in the world market, international division of labour, state formations and the linkages between all these and the international aid industry. To get a better grasp on these and related issues, we need a joint and sustained venture involving anthropologists, sociologists, political scientists, economists, nutritionists, historians and the like. But most important, the "study of gender" in all its diversity and complexity requires both the "insider" and the "outsider" points of view, which can only be accomplished through closer co-operation on equal terms between researchers across the world.

THE ROLE OF RESEARCHERS IN PLANNING

In my presentation I have deliberately chosen to focus on the quality and content of reporting, simply because without a well-informed message there is no need for researchers to embark on a communication process with planners at all. This is not to deny that the style and form of reporting is important for driving the message home. A simpler language and briefer reports figure on the top of the list of wants from planners to researchers. To improve the
"readability" of research reports by weeding out unnecessary disciplinary slogans and "magic" would benefit both parties, a project where researchers could benefit from establishing closer co-operation with professional editors. To reduce reports summary of generalities, however, is a complex issue and one not to be accepted on face value. If research/consultant reports are meant to serve as basic documents in planning (an enterprise which is inherently both detailed and specific) and later for action, it follows that a set of generalities and "universals" would not do. If, however, the reports are meant merely as "travelogues" or inputs for policy papers, primarily aimed at convincing the home audience about the importance of allocating funds for aid, then "generalities" and "universals" are probably what suits the purpose best.

To play the "devil's advocate", it is indeed a puzzle that while planners see the use of in-depth investigation, and rightly so, before constructing a road and are apparently willing to go through the time-consuming task to check out volumes of detailed measurement and drawings made by the engineer consultant, they tend to insist that a thin account on the "social infrastructure" suffice when they set out to change or "improve" other people's lives. To put it bluntly, it is at best rather "exotic", or at worst rather naive, just to think of "improving" a system without a qualified understanding of the dynamics and workings of the very same system one seeks to "improve". The seeds to this bias in what kind of information is considered significant, seems to be the overrepresentation of technical expertise in aid agencies.

Although we can be quite sympathetic to the workload and problems of influence held by the few social planners inside these organisations, it seems to me that to reduce their readings to the bare minimum would be to treat the immediate cause as the significant cause, when it seems that an upgrading and replenishment of staff with the expertise in social sciences would be a more apt remedy. This is all the more pressing because past and present experiences show us that, alas, the outcome of short-cuts when planning for change in other societies is a high level of uncertainty and a high risk of failures and unintended consequences. Give that any plan—be it technical, economic or social in scope—has to be implemented within a particular socio-economic context, reduction of the risk factor is clearly dependent on an increase in the information planners have about the main socio-economic conditions and processes. The critical issue in all development assistance is to anticipate how the population concerned is likely to react to alternative inputs and what the broader consequences of these reactions will be.

This is not to suggest that planners should spend all their time reading long and complicated research reports. The concept of "optimal ignorance",

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that is the crucial knowledge needed to channel aid investments in positive ways, is clearly in place. Yet, "optimal ignorance" of planners must be matched with "maximum knowledge" by researchers, rather than a general ignorance by planners, consultants and researchers alike, which is a particularly bad combination. To improve all links in the communication process, would probably require a more refined "division of labour", for instance the use of "consultants", familiar with both planning and research, as mediators and translators between researchers and planners, or the use of researchers for designing and following up a piece of study to be accomplished by consultants or other relevant people.

In sum, the current trends in feminist research should not serve as blueprints for planning any more than the previous ones and those to come. Aid agencies should not treat research findings and models as ultimate "truths", not because researchers are particularly "untrustworthy" persons, but rather because the nature of research itself is essentially open ended, precisely because human nature is not of mechanical character. What investigations can accomplish is to narrow the margin of error in planning. But it is equally obvious that the degree of precision of any predications increases proportionally with a better understanding of how the various features chosen for study are produced, maintained or changed by a set of specific conditions.
References


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