



***Power and poverty. Reducing gender inequality
by ways of rural employment?***

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Abstract

This contribution discusses options and constraints of gender sensitive interventions for income generation and poverty alleviation in rural areas. We will thereby complicate the views on how women's economic empowerment offers a primary way out of poverty. More so, we will challenge the popularised imaginary of the economically empowered woman who has turned herself into a successful entrepreneur. We will do so by discussing the potential of measures and instruments usually applied by development programs to assess shifts in gender roles and responsibilities.

In this paper, we pursue two main objectives. The first aims at reframing measures of economic development in a gender equality perspective. Our reflections will be based on project evaluations as performed by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation SDC. The second objective is directed towards an improved gender equality performance by ways of modifying project instruments such as monitoring and evaluation.

We will illustrate how projects and programs are implemented according to the logic of economic empowerment and we argue that the conventional understanding of poverty and gender roles limits the monitoring for qualitative change. Modifications for concepts will be suggested with reference to project management tools. We aim at discussing the performance of development interventions on the one hand while attempting to contribute to a theoretical debate on economic development and empowerment from a practical perspective.

1. Introduction

“Before, we used to argue all the time. Now, our lives are much calmer.” The SDC post-harvest program supports Nicaraguan peasant families to invest in silos. As a result, the families suffer fewer losses during storage which positively impacts on food security. Additional income and lower expenses as well as qualitative changes in women’s status are frequently listed as additional advantages. Low-income families benefit from stress reduction and a more harmonious environment. “The endless bickering over food is over,” says Margarita Potosme, who is married to a farmer who owns 11 silos. Above all, women have more liberty to earn an extra income for the family. As in 74.7 % of participant families included in the evaluation, Margarita’s workload was significantly reduced since the silo made shucking and shelling corn superfluous. 67% of user households perceive that silo storage offers women more opportunities to sell corn, since it is loose and clean, ready to sell at any moment. Throughout the year, Margarita sells cakes and other products made from maize and beans in the local neighbourhood or at roadside stands between towns, providing extra cash for her family. Previously, this was only possible during the post-harvest period. 51% of the silos in the sample were handled by women which underlines their major role in food security.¹

Who hasn’t read them, the countless success stories in which women are celebrated as the heroines who will lead their families out of poverty - heroines very well designed to underline the adequacy, the success and the sustainability of development interventions. Women have become prominent targets for empowerment initiatives and they are frequently staged by development agencies as agents of change.

This contribution discusses options and constraints of gender sensitive interventions for income generation and poverty alleviation in rural areas. We will thereby complicate the views on how economic empowerment of women offers a primary way out of poverty. More so, we will challenge the popularised imaginary of the economically empowered woman who has turned herself into a successful entrepreneur. We will do so by discussing the potential of measures and instruments usually applied by development programs to assess shifts in gender roles and responsibilities.

The paper will focus on the logic of project management which rarely includes outcome indicators for expected changes in gender relations. Questions of power on household and intra-household levels as well as with respect to a broader level of society are equally omitted. We will show how projects and programs are implemented according to the logic of economic empowerment and we argue that the conventional understanding of poverty and gender roles limits monitoring options for qualitative results and change. Modifications for concepts will be suggested with reference to project management tools. We aim at discussing the performance of development

interventions on the one hand while attempting to contribute to a theoretical debate on economic development and empowerment from a practical perspective.

2. Objectives

In this paper, we pursue two main objectives which will be outlined in the following subsections. The first aims at reframing measures of economic development in a gender equality perspective. Our reflections will be based on SCD project evaluations. The second objective is directed towards an improved gender equality performance by ways of modifying project instruments such as monitoring and evaluation. This paper reflects an ongoing debate which is being lead by the SDC gender desk. Results are therefore subject to discussion and change and the paper assumes an explorative character.

2.1 Reframing measures of economic development in a gender equality perspective

Traditional concepts of poverty alleviation heavily draw on economic understandings of efficiency, competitiveness and growth. They feature the market as the primary driver for poverty alleviation measures. In this contribution we aim at discussing a more comprehensive notion of development. This notion is based upon a human rights/women's rights approach and includes questions of income distribution, access and control over assets, care and wellbeing as crucial elements of gender equality and social development. Particularly we will address questions of time allocation. We argue that care work should be included as a critical aspect of economic development and assessed as a value added to growth and wellbeing, instead of blinding it as a background condition for investment. We will ask about lessons to be learnt by holding this debate against project practices.

Particularly, our aim is to address the relevance of gender and the impact this has on the perception and description of poverty, problems and strategies for poverty reduction and gender equality. We argue that income generating activities for women may lead to empowerment, improved livelihoods, higher living standard and welfare for rural households if a more comprehensive framework is applied. This includes accounting for the specific conditions and contexts in which the target group is implicated, as well as a careful analysis of intra-household relations. It further aims at an analysis of the interrelations between different scales of action and different time perspectives.

2.2 Heading for an improved gender equality performance

In a second step, we attempt to show how conventional procedures of project planning and implementation may be improved by a comprehensive and long-term system of monitoring and evaluation of gender equality issues. We suggest to include gender equality as a dynamic system of power relations into the monitoring procedure. We won't be offering a recipe as to how this is best

accomplished. Rather, we aim at discussing options and constraints implicated in the common monitoring frameworks regarding our idea of a dynamic interpretation of power relations. We will ask for the value added provided by what we would call an experimental monitoring system which encompasses a balanced approach of risks and opportunities and of bridging different and possibly segregated areas of everyday life.

Monitoring interventions for gender equality is evidently a challenge, even more so if gender equality is framed within a perspective of intersectionality. The framing of standards and the limits of quantitative monitoring need to be included into this discussion, so are the question of comparable data, accountability and context relevance. Above all, we aim at featuring responsibilities and political decisions. We hold that successful poverty alleviation strategies require an engagement with gender gaps in project planning, implementation and evaluation. Systematic gender mainstreaming based on a strong commitment by donors, partners, program managers and States are preconditions to achieve this goal.

The present paper results from a joint effort by a team of researchers, project leaders and quality management officers. As such, it is a product of transdisciplinary debate. Along the way we dealt with standards, data aggregation and the question of commensurability. We will start from a very brief outline of literature on gender and economic development.

3. Debates on gender and economic development

Starting with Esther Boserup's seminal contribution in the context we write and present this paper is like carrying coal to Newcastle. Boserup's influential initiative was widely debated and the role of women for development can't be underestimated ever since (Boserup 1970).

However, the outcome of the massive integration of a gender perspective in development research and practice in the past 4 decades is rather ambivalent. Gender has undergone its own mainstreaming process and as such was introduced as a policy in countless national and supranational institutions. Even if accompanied with heavy criticism, the feminist course by the institutions was successful in that gender-considerate development initiatives proliferated (Goetz 2004). The marriage of gender with global initiatives such as the MDGs permanently staged gender in public discourses. The frequency with which gender is named in the context of poverty alleviation strategies is striking. From the conjectured synergies between gender equity, economic growth and effective poverty alleviation an actual "win-win"-formula was derived (Rodenberg 2004, iv).

In terms of outcomes results remain quite modest. Far from having achieved the goal of equal opportunities, transforming gender into an administrative measure implied a trade off: Discourse on gender mainstreaming has become widespread, it is acknowledged in the development

community while its subversive edge is wearing off (Cornwall 2007). Regarding the meaning of gender for economic development in rural areas, we refer to the feminist critique with a special eye on care economy, paid and unpaid work and its gendered structure.

A most critical account of how Third World Women became a hugely prominent target of development agencies is provided by Gayatri Spivak. Her postcolonialist analysis delineates how women from developing countries were embraced by Western development policies, particularly by empowerment approaches and instruments of microfinance. Spivak argues that if microcredits are remitted to women without structural investments such as education and health systems for the poor, the exploitation of women will only increase. Allocating grants preferably to women because of their higher repayment behaviour will eventually have negative effects on women's health and well being. Gendered structures which in the end account for women's more reliable payment behaviour compared to men are directly linked to women's well being (Spivak 1999, 104). In an Indian government program, poor women were seen as harder working, easier to mobilise, more modest and better credit risks and thus the ideal poverty alleviation agents. Political and economic ends therefore soon outweighed the original feminist commitment to empowerment (John 2004, 247). The same holds for income generating projects, as they too are subject to a gendered logic (i.e. Elson 1995; 1999).

The assumption that women's empowerment automatically results from engagement in paid employment has been widely contested. Development agencies from around the world rather naively applauded the supposition that income-generating activity challenges existing household norms and decision-making structures. Mary Jones observed how evidence of enormous work burden stoically born by women was not interpreted as exploitation, but as efficiency by Indian government agencies (John 2004. 247).

Not only does the idea persist, "that money in women's hands will directly facilitate women into productive economic activity" (Pearson 2007, 207), but also, this activity is seen as an infallible means to convert power hierarchies within households and families. The need to account for intra-household relations, structural positions of men and women and gendered consequences of individual actions has been articulated by feminist economists for a long time. This includes conceiving the market as a gender-neutral momentum (Elson 1993). The lack of accounting for intra-household gender relations in assessments of income-generating activities and empowerment is one of the major criticisms raised by feminist theorists (Pearson 2007). Drawing on Amartya Sen's concept of 'cooperative conflict', Pearson criticises individualistic approaches to women's empowerment and pleads for a comprehensive perspective in which she is seen within her affective and economic relationships with other family and household members. According to Pearson, Sen's study highlights "... the ways in which earning money may extend women's options, but may also intensify their workload and responsibilities without necessarily increasing their autonomy" (Pearson 2007, 207).

Another criticism highlights intra-household relations by assuming that from the money earned by women the entire household, especially children, will directly benefit. Mc Clenaghan criticised the idea as overly romantic (Mc Clenaghan 1997). Too little emphasis has been put to understanding the conditions and the structures in which women's employment and their participation in the market take place. This is where development agencies promoting rural employment assume huge responsibility. Critical questions reaching beyond conventional project planning instruments such as logical frameworks for the management of project cycles are more than indicated, if not always welcomed. Institutional and time constraints sometimes obstruct the view on the complexity of what is exposed in current development terminology such as "livelihoods" or "households" and the trend towards (economically oriented) measuring of aid effectiveness impedes a conception of development which links visible short term processes with institutional change. There is an obvious need to negotiate to what extent contextual information such as socio-economic aspects have to be taken into account. Among these are women's domestic circumstances, their networks within and beyond the household, dynamics of the gendered division of labour, the political decision making processes as well as the personal identities of the couple (Faulkner and Lawson 1991).

Questions should be asked with respect to control over income as well as what might be the costs for women's engagement into waged work. Studies have demonstrated that with their wives assuming more financial responsibility for the household, men may come to the conclusion their contribution is no longer needed. They might decide to loosen their efforts for providing an income or invest in other relationships (Elson 1999). In the Indian case study reported by Bhatliwala and Dhanraj, men resentfully perceived women handling money as a source of humiliation (Bhatliwala and Dhanraj 2007). In sum, it is undeniable, as Sylvia Chant writes, that "the relationship between women and employment is a vexed one". She recommends to collect data which includes women's personal – and often contradictory – accounts of how employment influences their lives (Chant and Craske 2003, 197).

Apart from the conceptual underpinnings for our arguments we refer to the SDC Gender policy as a normative framework. Within SDC, gender is integral to the human rights approach. According to the SDC gender toolkit, gender "is determined by the conception of tasks, functions and roles attributed to women and men in society and in public and private life." (SDC 2003b, 1). Importantly, the document emphasises that gender relations are not static, and that they are organised within power structures (SDC 2003b). Another SDC reference document is entitled : "gender equality – a key for poverty alleviation and sustainable development" (SDC 2003a). The same document links gender equality, empowerment and good governance. Finally, we refer to CEDAW, where in art. 1 the need for strengthening rural markets for gender equality is highlighted. In cooperation with the Interdisciplinary Centre for Gender Studies ICFG at the University of Berne, SDC gender focal point maps out a strategy for regular exchange between operational experience and theoretical reflection.

The evidence for this paper is provided by the experiences of our colleagues and partners in the field and by senior fellows of the IZFG. Our reflections will be directed towards methodological modifications, on the basis of which we will draft some recommendations. With a small selection of projects in the sector of rural development we would like to substantiate our case, drawing upon feminist theory of development for embedding the results. Our information is based on five programs which are located on three continents. All of them encompass a focus on rural employment and specific objectives in terms of gender equality. As mentioned earlier, this dialogue is of explorative nature. Considering the project differences in terms of project cycle, general objectives and target population, direction and quality of the gender dialogue we've been leading with each of them vary. This will be reflected in the way we refer to each of the projects. In the following sections the projects will be outlined very briefly.

4. Project Profiles: Short Cuts

Central America

The project operating in Nicaragua, El Salvador and Guatemala encompasses three components. 1. Post-harvesting initiatives to support food storage in crafted silos, 2. Enhancement of small and medium entrepreneurship, 3. Support in alternative organic pest control. The main objective of this program is the strengthening and consolidation of methodological capacities and skills development of farmers' organizations, extensionists and institutions in these three sectors. Beneficiaries are small and medium scale farmers and their families.

Gender inequalities were identified as a hampering factor and therefore addressed with special actions with the aim to integrate women and men equally in the technical programs. The logframe was therefore complemented with gender indicators, and the participation of women was enhanced.

Bangladesh

The Livelihood, Empowerment and Agroforestry project LEAF project is set to make a substantial contribution to the long-term reduction of poverty through a more sustainable and intensified use of local resources. The strategies include increasing income and employment opportunities of poor households through skills and knowledge development; the improvement of the capacities of community organisations and their networks to lead and manage local development processes and access to services and markets.

Gender equality is conceived as a transversal issue. Women and men are supposed to have the same participation opportunities. Awareness building for women and men on rights and social issues will specifically be addressed, and income opportunity initiatives particularly engage women in market analysis and income generating activities.

Mongolia

As a main objective a pasture ecosystem management aiming at increasing the animal productivity and sustainable herd management issues is identified. The program focuses on ancient and traditional livelihoods of herders in high mountains and desert zones. Expected outcomes are the productivity of the animals, well managed herds and a policy dialogue on issues in livestock sector. It will improve the options of value chains and the institutional capacities of herders' groups. The project will work at family level to guarantee access to knowledge and equal participation to project benefits.

Burkina Faso/Mali

The original idea was brought up by women's groups who were afraid that the Karité tree², an important crop for women's diversified income strategies, would progressively disappear. The analysis of the tree management included a gender perspective. Gender relations behind the tree cultivation were revealed subsequently. One objective of the project was to reinforce the local tree management in the interface of tree owners, producers and consumers, and at the same time to increase the influence of local actors at national level where trade policies are issued. The main goal is to promote a framework for a regulation to consolidate the role of women as managers and preservers of the resource.

Laos

The project goal is to contribute to a high level of food security, to reduce poverty in rural areas, to induce inclusive economic growth, better productivity and profitability of agriculture and forestry. The main strategy is directed at the development of a decentralized, participatory, and sustainable agricultural extension system which targets poorer households and communities, and reaches male and female farmers equally.

Our data from is organised according to the SDC gender equality checklist, which was originally developed for the gender responsive budgeting initiative of SDC. This facilitates the comparison and aggregation of experiences and challenges, on which we will base our conclusions, key issues to be discussed and possible propositions for improved gender equality strategies in this area of intervention.

The **checklist** covers two sets of questions:

1. Questions on gender mainstreaming performance (institutional strategies)
2. Questions on gender equality issues.

Both sets are relevant for understanding of what elements are changing and in which direction change is induced. We will address the sets separately in order to guarantee standardisation. We will start with questions on gender mainstreaming performance by outlining methods to be more context-considerate in project planning and implementation.

5. Accounting for social contexts

Income generating activities for women may lead to empowerment, improved livelihoods, higher living standard and welfare for rural households if a more comprehensive framework is applied. This includes accounting for the specific conditions and contexts in which the target group is implicated, as well as a careful analysis of intra-household relations.

Income is a crucial element in improving the wellbeing of rural families and it obviously contributes to poverty reduction. Women's involvement into paid labour has long been debated with view to their roles and position in families. However, these debates were criticised not only for their biased account of gender roles in families and the institution of the family as such, but also for perpetuating gender stereotypes (Chant and Craske 2003, 195). Women in the South have since long assumed multiple functions within the household economy. By ways of cash income they respond to their gender specific responsibilities at household and community level. This may increase women's opportunities to invest directly according to the needs of their immediate social network, or to strengthen fields of their traditional activities, such as the production of homemade cheese (like in Mongolia), of small scale organic fertilizer or sewing workshops (like in Bangladesh), or, as common for Central America, home based fruit and vegetable conservation. Beyond all the limits, employment – and be it in the informal sector and without security or protection - might benefit women, as some earlier studies indicate (Moore 1988). It can (but not always does) open additional opportunities for political, social, professional roles. It is therefore critical for gender equality policy to specify the trade offs between the competing objectives of benefit and equal rights.

A promising approach: women as agents against poverty

Worldwide, women's access to earnings has increased by 5% between 1996 and 2006 (ILO 2007). "The move from being an unpaid contributing family worker or a low paid own-account worker into wage and salaried employment is a major step forward in terms of freedom and self-determination", ILO writes, highlighting this progress as an important contribution to the UN Millennium Development Goal 3. The share of women in wage employment in the non-agricultural sector is a key indicator to measure progress in this respect. It shows clearly that the poorer a country or a region, the smaller the share is (ILO 2007).

The increasing need for cash in order to respond to the monetization of goods for everyday needs and services formerly provided by the states is an important precondition for the growing informal sector which absorbs a major number of working women (Pearson 2007). The increasing access of rural women to paid employment is pushed by the policies and economic paradigms of donors, states and privates, including the so-called "m4p" banks ("making markets work for the poor"). They departed from the feminist notion of empowerment as it was portrayed in the 1980s and have been promoting women as a special target group ever since. Developing states adopt

gender responsive extension programmes in their economic development strategies. In the context of international cooperation, an abundance of concepts and tools were developed in order to open windows of opportunity and for women to become successful entrepreneurs or farmers. Trainings for service providers and extensionists are offered in order to make them more gender sensitive. With the growing interest of implementing agencies in women as potential entrepreneurs and actors for driving their communities out of poverty, the gender issue was underlined in the training of technical experts and in the elaboration of tools and methods. Gender mainstreaming was successfully integrated to the growth-oriented approach to end poverty, so it seems. The shared objective of enhancing choices for women, to improve the conditions of their everyday lives and their empowerment as active members of society and markets represents a milestone in gender and development-initiatives. But does this equally mark a transformation in terms of power relations?

Beyond individual livelihood improvements: projects targeting structural transformation

Palmerinda Valdés, the first woman trained as a postharvest artisan in Guatemala, was very young when she was orphaned. She learned to make silos, and to date has made over 260, overcoming the mistrust of many customers who had little faith in the work of a woman. She has taken the courses on business advisory support. Then she got her husband to take the training, and now both of them work together. Their earnings enabled her to lend him money to invest in agriculture, and although she has 11 children, she has studied, graduated, and now she is a schoolteacher. She also leads a group of 2,000 women on Mt. Jalapa and had the honor of a visit from former President Álvaro Arzú, during a field visit. She is the epitome of personal progress, overcoming customers who didn't trust women, and showing how post-harvest technology transformed the life of a woman who got trained as an artisan (Bravo Martínez 2008).

Numerous success stories portray women who have become entrepreneurs, managers, traders or politicians as a result of project interventions. Women's options and choices are in fact increasing, as the projects in Laos, Bangladesh, Mongolia, Mali, Burkina Faso or Central America illustrate. Much less evidence is available of structural changes leading to more equality in terms of roles, power relations or control over assets. Assumptions that income generating activities for women do automatically lead to improved livelihood and wellbeing turned out to be misleading. There are programs of micro financing which had to be closed due to increasing intra household violence, suicide, new forms of exploitation, rural urban migration to escape debts which accumulated from failed interest payments.³

The following example illustrates attempts to include gender in income generating programs. We will question how these programs respond to assumed and real needs of women for cash and access to markets, and we will discuss how such initiatives are challenged.

Contextualising rural employment programs for women

The Livelihood, Empowerment and Agroforestry project LEAF in Bangladesh was recently complemented by a focus on gender inequalities. Initially, an appraisal of the context specific gender inequalities such as women's needs, resources and traditional roles in the production for self-sufficiency was conducted. By way of a 'Participatory Gender Analysis' (PGA) information on gender inequalities in the communities was revealed. The relevant parameters included women's and men's roles and responsibilities in the domestic setting, decision making process and power relations, control over assets, self-determination, women's and men's mobility and their respective status in the community.

It was found that "Strong patriarchal power relations and religious belief determine the unequal gender relations".⁴ Among the major gender constraints lower wages for agricultural work, unequal access to and control over resources (land, working capital, technology) unequal access to services, (e.g financial services, education, health) and marketing channels were identified. Women are less likely than men to own land and other resources, and even when they do, they are hardly assigned control. This inequality is sustained by the lack of women's involvement in decision making processes, unfavorable marital and inheritance laws, family and community norms. Although women may have greater mobility constraints, particularly as wives and mothers, off-farm work is important for them. Besides discrimination of women in terms of rights and inequality another major gender constraint is their exclusion from capacity development⁵

Based on these findings the focus of the program was modified. A gender specific line to promote women's economic empowerment through access to market and additional income was introduced. Gender equality objectives were specified and added to the main project goals. Subsequently, specific initiatives to engage women in income generating activities (IGA), skills development and market analysis were launched. Among the instruments which were introduced to improve the impact of community based organisations on gender and social equality at community level were female mentors. Another product provided financial support to women and disadvantaged groups to initiate IGAs. The program engaged in questions of local governance and community development with awareness raising activities and trainings. A module on legal rights raised questions related to the reduction of dowry, early marriage, promotion of equal wages for women, domestic torture. Apparently, these incidents decreased. CBOs⁶ and especially women's groups were supported to strengthen their organisational self help capacities and to organise in larger network clusters. Indeed, the Bangladesh case produced some positive outcomes, at least at first glance, as the results indicate:

About 63 % of the women in CBOs improved their status at family level, for 30% this also holds for community level. According to the 2007 gender audit, nearly 50% of the female group members assume responsibility for decisions on household level. According to the CBO grading report, 49% of the CBOs send women representatives into the different local committees. 93% of

the clusters adopted at least one type of initiatives for reducing legal gender discrimination with respect to dowry, early marriage, torture of women etc. Another result is the participation of 9% women who are involved in village mediation processes. About 86% of the female CBO members from extreme poor households and 79% from poor households have become involved in and are directly benefiting from economic activities, mostly in terms of increased income.⁷

A big challenge remains: As the review indicated, women's control over income has not really increased (only 14%) and their involvement in business activities and access to markets, particularly at a higher level of the value chain, is limited (9% increased). Inequality in wage rates between male and female labourers persists with an average of 93 taka (2007) and 119 taka (2008) for men compared to 62 taka (2007) and 79 taka (2008) for women. And, although their membership in different types of local committees has increased (32% between 2007 and 2008), only about 5% of the CBO female members were involved in decision making processes (no progress between 2007 and 2008). These results underline the pattern outlined in the theoretical section: Income generating activities may improve the situation of individual women, but it is still a long way to induce structural changes, as it is also the case for the political sphere, where women could increase their representation, without gaining local political influence through their participation in CBOs. The outcome of the Bangladesh intervention raises the question as to the conditions under which income can be converted into power and control.

The results from the evaluation were rather unexpected and the findings lead to a fundamental revision of the program frameworks. One of the conceptual modifications refers to the question of assets. Clearly, time, energy and well-being are equally to be counted as assets. However, it often exceeds the programs methodological frame to account for the complex socioeconomic dynamics at micro-, meso-, and macro-level. Thus complexity is being reduced to stereotypes about women's and men's roles and responsibilities. The culturalised and or essentialising justification of negative outcomes is a way to deal with the incongruity of program logics and the reduction of gender inequalities. This is illustrated for the problem of women's participation in the market, which can easily be provided at the local scale, while their integration in the broader market system is rather exceptional. This question is likely to be answered by ways of cultural stereotypes, assuming that women are less mobile and therefore excluded from those market activities which imply greater mobility and technical know how.

The gendered rationalization of women's lacking control over their income risks to remain undisputed because it fits into the dominant perception of Bangladeshi society. If unintended consequences interfere with the program objectives, culturalisation is an often used rationale to account for the circumstances. The same holds, if program objectives are too general and therefore hard to control. By reducing the complex circumstances of the program setting, other sensitive articulations of difference are likely to be blinded, and so are fields for future action. We certainly acknowledge the need for generalisation in program management. A gender-considerate analysis

prevents program managers from simplified perceptions of the actors involved and can illuminate the reasons for unexpected dynamics which may result from development interventions.

This question will be further discussed in context of the second hypothesis. The next chapter presents an attempt to link economic issues with other domains of human activities, above all the political arena where bargaining power is negotiated and redefined, and the conditions for social transformation are negotiated.

Connecting scales

As rural development aims at increasing the proportion of people in the labour market, success is often measured in terms of the number of participants. Project managers face serious problems, if the number of women remains low. In Bangladesh, the origin of the problem was located in the cultural system, in other contexts it is linked to the fact, that women do not yet act as entrepreneurs, that they lack adequate education and capacity building or that their priorities are different due to their family responsibilities. The perspective is rather narrow, focussing on the micro-systems of roles, needs and responsibilities, which are more or less underscored with cultural stereotypes. There is an obvious need for a more comprehensive perspective which links changes at household level to the broader market system and its objectives in promoting small entrepreneurship. Development programs are implemented at the interface of the different logics of household and community development on one side and economic growth on the other. While gender equality is becoming a central point in the first paradigm, this is rarely the case in the second one. Even if we analyse decision making processes, time use and control over the assets at household level, the findings are not related to the broader economic system and its instruments like micro financing, promotion of entrepreneurship, or labour force allocation. In this logic the different responsibilities women assume in their roles as mothers, carers or farmers are not seen as structuring elements. The fact that women might just not be able or willing to play the role as "value adding actors" can therefore not be explained in market terms.

These gendered differences are not considered referring to time-use, as discussed in the next section. The promotion of entrepreneurship hardly includes time constraints as a factor which might determine participation rates and inclusion-exclusion.

Gendered time use

Women's participation in rural employment initiatives and even in the local political spheres is increasing, as the project experiences we refer to in this paper show. However, women do not get liberated from other time and energy consuming responsibilities which are assigned to them according to traditional gender roles and even if their bargaining power might raise, it is not there where those decisions are taken which determine the life of rural people by, among other things, draw the line between remunerated and unremunerated work (income possibilities, infrastructural

investments, social protection, service delivery systems and subsidies). “The bulk of unpaid care work across all economies and cultures is performed by women” (Budlender 2008, 1). This is rarely taken into account within project planning and implementation not even if gender equality is considered as a leading principle, and even less in programmes of public system reforms, fiscal policies or decentralization processes. Of course, the category “woman” indicates a very heterogeneous group at this point. With the question of time use women’s situation in terms of employment status, having children in the household, being married and age need to be accounted for (Budlender 2008).

The time women have at their disposal, and the options they have to use this limited resource for income generating activities have to be integrated systematically into the poverty reduction strategies and their market logic. This also implicates the revision of the assumption that in the end women will guarantee care work even if they have less time and less money to alleviate the burden of housework. The bias resulting from blinding the reproductive part of economy because women are implicitly assumed to do it has to be challenged on project planning level. The way how unpaid care work is organised is reflected in community organisation, its political structure and the fiscal system. This implies not only awareness building in the agencies and with individual program managers and their teams. Furthermore, given understandings of development and economic growth have to be reconsidered according to these insights and challenged in their interfaces. The problem raises questions of women’s and men’s bargaining power within households and communities and what measures are likely to induce change in this respect. Structural conditions for households are therefore at stake.

Structural conditions for households

In the rural development program of SDC in Central America women are specifically addressed as rural entrepreneurs or small farmers. With access to new technologies and know-how, micro-credits or innovative methods for pest control women perceive themselves as empowered: “My husband spends more time at home and with the children, he respects the decisions I am taking, he shares his income with mine to cover the household expenses (in: Bravo Martínez 2008)⁸. A closer look at the category of women participating in the program results in a more nuanced picture. The female participants of a micro-credit program are all heads of households, as opposed to farmers’ wives or unemployed or workers. These women organized at household level to share responsibilities without challenging gender power relations. They did not have to bargain for their role as breadwinners but were considered as such by the other household members and the community due to the absence of an adult male. The economic empowerment of these women was relevant for the household but did not impact on other households where women were assumed to be wives in the first place, and therefore no income generating capacity was assigned to them. The gendered structure of employment or paid work in general is not directly challenged by the project. The given example seems to illustrate that positions endowed with power such as being the head of the household facilitates empowerment. This is substantiated by Chant, who underlines the

neutralizing effects of women's strategies such as inviting co-resident individuals or extended kin (Chant 2007). Within and outside the household however, other constraints and vulnerabilities need to be taken into account, especially in terms of changing market conditions, as will be underlined by the case of Karité-production collectives from Mali and Burkina Faso discussed below.

The question therefore goes beyond the availability of paid work and women's access to income. The conditions under which these women are involved in paid and unpaid work are crucial. These conditions will foster the wellbeing in one case but constrain the healthy development of the family in another. Still there are some factors which are generally rather seen as limiting factors. Legal frameworks, labour markets, educational systems, welfare systems are generally deeply gender biased and therefore often perpetuate gender inequality. This bias leads to context specific inequalities and discriminations articulated in women's and men's everyday life. In the domain of rural development and income generation, there is evidently a lack of collateral, knowledge, access to technical and other innovations – incidents which are addressed by the type of programs we discuss in this paper. These factors are exacerbated by restricted access to services and information, increasing work load and time scarcity, little participation in public spheres and decision making processes. This is one form of how structural discrimination is manifested.

Gender differences are also manifest in the way people perceive and present themselves. Women and men have different perceptions of their roles as economically active members of society. In Nicaragua, women cultivate corn for the household. They produce a little surplus – which is easier since they have silos – to make sure that even in bad times the family has enough food. Aiming at self sufficiency, these women are not likely to change their production pattern, even as the prize of corn increases. Men are likely to select the crop with a higher price on the market. The reasons for this choice are seen men's ambition to advance the value chain, to achieve greater yield for investment in cash crop, and to invest in export oriented production and prestige. For men their bargaining power in household and communities is expected to rise as they start to command larger shares of resources and benefit from increasing prestige which opens the door for irregular financial contributions to households. “Along with reducing the resources available to other household members, irregularity in financial contributions can lead to serious vulnerability and ‘secondary poverty’ among women and children” (Chant 2007, 39).

The process described is less a characteristic of male choices than a result of market promotion which tends to address men, inviting them to become engaged in agro-business activities. The choice is different because of the particular gender roles and responsibilities, and because these roles are not challenged in conventional project approaches. Even if these measures correspond to and are conform with social expectations, in the end women's positions might be downgraded because of the competing strategies of self-sufficiency and cash crop. Women's position might change for the worse because of their shrinking options to guarantee food security. It is therefore the role of local government to facilitate the translation of everyday needs and

choices into a long term policy, adjusted to the changes in economic and political life, for example by making budget allocations and state subsidies responsive to gender equality. Among these are incentives for mixed cultivation, incentives for local products and price control in local markets. In the case of Bangladesh busses were organised to transport women to the market, a state's investment in infrastructure to increase women's mobility.

Incidence oriented governance can make a difference when macroeconomic decisions are implemented. With this we would like to underline, that income alone does not lead to more economic and social mobility, since the value of the cash generated by these women as small entrepreneurs or paid farmers depends on the market, on the time use and on the responsibilities to meet the needs of the household. Much of this depends indirectly upon national economic and public service policies. Budget cuts in health and education negatively impacted on women in the Mongolian case. While men went on spending their income on herder related activities (fuel, veterinarian fees, etc.), women used their small incomes for the tuition of their daughters.

Governance structure is decisive in that democratically organized communities perform better when it comes to gender equality. Political entities seek more equality by balancing the burden, via needs-based earmarking of the expenses and participatory budget processes. In contrast, in communities with strong hierarchical structures and a weak community identity as in the case of the herder society of Mongolia, it is rather difficult for women of poor households to obtain equal access to assets delivered by agencies or the state. This makes the local level of political action a critical intersection of processes and mechanisms of exclusion and inclusion. State policies of economic, fiscal and legal decentralization are therefore seen as core issues of gender equality mainstreaming.

Enhancing women's organising

The case of Mali illustrates how initiatives can be reframed as political initiatives by supporting women's organising. The project example demonstrates the importance of open space for women to organize. In the given example this was effected as a union based on the common interests and duties in the fruit cycle of Karité⁹. The project aimed at enhancing women's capacities, knowledge and access to technologies; a side effect was to give their voices a political meaning. The collective performance was carried into local politics where decisions about the regulations of the use of the Karité parks are taken. Women's movements and their explicit claims helped to institutionalize gender issues into the local management of Karité, an essential step in the local economic development and national policy dialogue. But even if the local structures assume the commitment there is no guarantee that women keep their access to Karité and its value added, as the program experience illustrates. The increasing demand on the international market caused a drastic rise in the price which motivated the men of the village to appropriate women's assets. This was expressed by a leading community member:

“Le karité est un arbre qui nous a été donné par le Bon Dieu. A cause de son exploitation difficile, nous les hommes nous avons attribué son exploitation aux femmes. Cette année [2007], la flambée des prix des amandes nous amène à revoir notre position et je pense que d’ici quelques années, les hommes vont exploiter le karité.”¹⁰

If women control assets and organize themselves in cooperatives the risk to loose the assets is minimal. If women struggle on their own they are more likely to loose their privilege. Again it’s a combination of local governance, its gender responsiveness and the disposition of national politics to defend gendered local interests. These interests need to be framed in the sense of communal development and not of single household or entrepreneurial quest for maximum output. Subsidizing communal budgets for economic development would be one way to do this. In a more long-term perspective an increase of expenditures on social infrastructure should be promoted inducing job creation at local level combined with social safety nets and gender responsive protection schemes (Seguino 2009). Instead of weakening local community budgets, local development should be sustained by allocating budgets which not only cover basic needs but open a fiscal space for an integrative community building process.

Creating new inequalities

The political system in which women and men participate as economically active individuals is therefore a critical factor. It is a big difference whether gender sensitive rural economic development programs are implemented in a vertical or horizontal political structure, whether power is centralized or decentralized. Obviously, democratically organised political participation is more likely to prevent new hierarchies among women. With some women gaining access to new income sources and others not, projects run the risk of generating new gaps and discrimination between women. This is another reason why we highlight the aspect of care work and unpaid work in general. Women who have climbed the ladder in terms of income may hire lower status women as servants and therefore perpetuate exploitative structures that programs were meant to extinguish. In Bangladesh, SDC promotes a local governance approach,¹¹ which in the future should be more systematically linked to the programs of economic development. Even though the two approaches have different logics the outcomes will be more effectively interrelated. With the combined approach issues of governance and participation and their importance when it comes to economic empowerment and social mobility are centre staged. The given experience shows the limitations of sectoral approaches.

A third example is illustrated in the case of Laos. The implementing agency convinced the ministry of agriculture to bring the gender issue upfront and to officially endorse a declaration on gender equality in the extension for agriculture project. This initiative created a common understanding the different roles women and men assume in agriculture and their respective contribution to growth. Therefore it offered an entry point for gender responsive management and targeted policies.

However, effectiveness and results strongly depend from the scope of the government, its implication in the bigger system of price politics, and the willingness to address related problems in the social policy domain. Especially in countries whose economy is increasingly integrated into the global market, public services are declining while the demand for cash to cover basic needs like health care and school fares is increasing. An illuminating example is coming from Mongolia. Responding to the increasing need for cash, a special support for rural people to become entrepreneurs was initiated. Gender issues are debated intensively in Mongolia, partly due to the high educational level of women who are addressed by programs as special groups in most cases. By means of the program women improved their livelihoods by increasing their options and choices. Still, the improvement to their situation was limited. First of all, the money was absorbed by new costs for services which were covered by the state before. Given the fact that 15 to 20 years ago school and health services were public, nowadays the fees are high, and many services have been privatized, are overpriced or bad in quality, especially when they are state owned. On the other hand, the local market systems didn't really develop, on the contrary, the role of import economy is increasing while industries are breaking down. This leads to an increased dependency on traded goods for household consumption. There are gender specific responsibilities in the household settings, even though it is not as strict among herders as among small farmers. Still, this difference has to be taken into account. The increasing need for cash and the gender biased offer of income generating activities implies a hidden undermining of the formerly existing gender equalities. The result is an increasing gap between the economic power of men having access to sectors like artisan mining where the income is increasing. Women can meet their needs for cash in sectors like petty trading and small enterprise where the benefit rate is very low and the possibilities for capacity development rare. This does not only reinforces existing inequalities, but pushes men and women into new, labour market driven unequal power relations.

Women have little alternatives, especially in rural areas where the dominant mode of production is herding. They may have access to assets for setting up an enterprise, however the conditions remain very adverse: scarcity of water and electricity, very long days for a very small income, and no collateral to extend the enterprise. The promotion of rural women entrepreneurs in the non-agricultural sector only contributes to gender equality if the amount of time for production is in a reasonable proportion to the income. For entrepreneurs (processing of yak wool, milk, leather), there are limited possibilities to improve the input (capital, time and energy)-output (income) relation, even if we don't consider all the other long term effects like health and intra-family relations. The Mongolia gender assessment¹² clearly indicated an increasing gender specific need for cash which pushes women into situations where they have to sell their labour force at very bad prices. Within projects they are welcomed as potential entrepreneurs. Through the program women get access to markets even though they remain very locally bound.

The Gender Country Assessment sheds light on gender equality as a very complex problem. Aspects such as the structure and dynamic of the labour market, economic development including prices, export and import policies, public services (trends in quality, prices, access), the welfare

system (schemes for groups, allocation of non targeted welfare etc) may all be linked to gender equality objectives. Culture and identity are equally influential. In the Mongolia example, gender relations are submitted to changing identity patterns of herders. Many of them become cheap labourers or micro entrepreneurs, an increasing number takes a job in the informal sector. Socialization and education systems are changing. Education is perceived as an important capital for girls, first of all because their future as herders is less evident as it is for boys. Therefore herders send the daughters to urban boarding schools where they are confronted with a strange world of consumption, an increasing need for cash and a threatening exploitation in the school system. Sex work is becoming one of the most lucrative ways of quickly getting to cash.

Summing up: gender equality – the key to the Pandora box of development?

The gender and poverty assessment in Mongolia draws on a rights based approach which delineates the complexity and intersectionality of gender as an intrinsic element of development. Still it is a big challenge to translate the results of the analysis into the logic of policy and project, and to develop baselines for a theory of change and meaningful development initiatives. The management systems which determine current development practice are very much driven by the principles of efficiency. Driven by an economic logic they are organised by sectors which makes it very difficult to adopt an intersectionality approach. It would go beyond the scope of this paper to analyse the managing principles, however we hold that in the context of poverty reduction strategies it is crucial to include gender mainstreaming performance.

This leads us to the second set of problems.

6. Gender within the project cycle

Successful poverty alleviation strategies require an engagement with gender gaps in project planning, implementation and evaluation. Systematic gender mainstreaming based on a strong commitment by donors, partners, program managers and states are prerequisites to achieve this goal. Actual commitment exceeds the rhetoric of which we find abundance on public platforms and in strategy papers. It implies fundamental debates on methodologies, concepts and ideas of transformation, among which some might be very radical. The commitment for gender equality includes an understanding of gender not just as an issue of women and men, but as a concept which scrutinises power relations in existing institutional settings. Under this perspective, international cooperation, its managing methods and specific notions of effectiveness are at stake. Critically assessing existing performances is a good start. The next step addresses questions of where and when gender equality issues should be addressed and where not and why. This discussion raises concerns as to whether the maxim of aid effectiveness and management approaches to development conceal this kind of power relations or whether they might offer new ways of engaging with them.

In the next paragraph we discuss the conventional way of gender mainstreaming as an element of a good performance of cooperation activities.

Gender responsive cooperation strategy: what makes a good performance?

The Country Gender Assessment of Mongolia is an instructive example which not only shows how inequalities can be assessed and be linked to different sectors. It also offers an opportunity to discuss the problems of monitoring and evaluating the impacts of poverty reduction strategies according to the do no harm-principle.

The conditions for poor women in Mongolia are not very promising, as a quote from the CGA illustrates: "Despite the unprecedented growth a disproportionate share of poor are women, who are driven to work in environments that expose them to greater risk and vulnerability. Market reform and cut backs on child care force women to take up precarious jobs in the informal sector. As a result of which women are increasingly being polarized into low productivity jobs with little or no social security benefits. Changes in the distribution of income reflect changes in the distribution of assets, and changes in the returns to human capital and labour market choices. Considerable vertical and horizontal segregation persists in the labour market. Women remain confined in the low paying agriculture, education, health and social services sector while men dominate the higher paying public administration and national defense sectors." (CGA Mongolia 2009).

The CGA starts with a general observation of gender inequalities, and subsequently analyses the gender dimensions of economic growth, labour markets and their correlations to health, education, human integrity and political participation. The data collected in this analysis not only provides an excellent instrument for women's rights movements, professionals and politicians. It is also a comprehensive baseline for gender equality mainstreaming of the program of SDC and its compliance with the gender equality policy. The findings substantiated the gender goals the agency subsequently defined for the program. The data allows SDC to analyse its sectorial approach, to review the projects identified and to change the focus if needed according to the issues of inequality. The agency organizes workshops with the technical staff to improve their gender awareness, but also to increase their access to information and provide insights on gender inequalities.

The monitoring agencies, in this case SDC, can improve their performance by asking a set of questions. The first is about commitment and gender equality goals including the objectives of anti-discrimination activity. The explicit promotion of gender is at stake. As long as gender equality does not figure in the program documents, it is impossible to hold anyone accountable for it. There is a risk that gender equality criteria are added to documents, and yet no one claims for the implementation of the commitments.

It is largely uncontested, that systematic gender mainstreaming can only be achieved with a strong commitment for gender equality. Donors, implementing organisations, NGOs and states are important stakeholders in creating and supporting an enabling environment for an effective and comprehensive gender mainstreaming performance. This includes a viable monitoring system, committed staff members who have been allocated enough resources in terms of time and money, a budget line for the performance of gender mainstreaming, gender expertise, and institutional commitment to work with and strengthen civil society movements for women's empowerment and gender equality at micro- meso- and macro-level.

Besides accountability it is key to reflect upon gender equality goals, in the sense of what has to change and who can take action. Otherwise gender equality remains a very vague and generalized objective. In a second step, the agency will guarantee that analytical data is available, giving evidence to the critical gender issues to be addressed in the selected areas. In the context of Mongolia, the CGA provides a comprehensive set of information about women's and men's roles, their practical and strategic needs and responsibilities, the gender specific opportunities and constraints on the labour market. It also provides data on gender division of labour, time use and health. The problem of violence is mentioned in an extra chapter. In the CGA the different national strategies in the areas of welfare, health education, labour market, including symbolic politics and discourse, and the fabrics of civil society organisations are addressed. This is especially interesting for SDC, since the agency is also involved in policy dialogue with the national government and civil society organisations.

Based on the comprehensive data including quantitative and qualitative information about gender inequalities and interfaces of different forms of discrimination, poverty reduction strategies can formulate more specific indicators in order to monitor their gender equality goals. The next steps consist in the identification of the relevant data for the development goals and translate it into a system of quantitative and qualitative indicators. These would have to be collected for the output level and the outcome level respectively. Changes can be observed from a broader perspective, breaking sector specific limitations by focussing the interfaces of different spheres of everyday practice. In this view action is conceived as an interconnecting process where different spheres of everyday life are affected in contingent ways. Conventional concepts of monitoring which tend to isolate and atomise existences are modified (Kabeer 2008). The complexity and the challenge of this process for technical staff can hardly be underestimated. As this procedure is technically sophisticated capacity building is a critical element of a sustainable gender mainstreaming performance. The CGA evidenced how the cash economy, social protection (financial services), the system of education (geographical distribution, tuition and fees) and the globalised mobility of human beings (Mongolia at crossroads of sex work and trafficking) are interconnected. Changes in one sphere sometimes have positive, sometimes negative effects on particular social groups in other spheres. Impacts on the lives of women and men usually diverge and have to be further questioned with respect to the ability of women, for example to take up work under decent

conditions without risking their daughters to face gender based violence. These questions vary from context to context, and they have to be pulled out from statistics, case studies, stories told and qualitative research.

The results of the CGA clearly indicates that by linking different spheres of society changes can be steered in a direction which corresponds to the needs of different social groups. The programs which aim at improving the opportunities of herders to get access to cash income, for example, will take into consideration not only the organisation of intra household dynamics (division of labour and responsibilities, spending strategies, intra-household and local power relations, time use, mobility and the division of remunerated and non-remunerated care work) but also the role of gender inequalities in socioeconomic policies pushed by the state and its international trade partners. The gender goal exceeds the criterion of the increased number of women herders having access to income by becoming small entrepreneurs. It also goes beyond the assumption that training and technology does empower women by facilitating their access to income generating activities. It does however include how women increase their status and decision making power in the spheres of their everyday lives. Women with an income might be better off now. From a long term perspective, they might become losers again, not only because they are driven into marginalized sectors, but also because the monetization of the system they live in is accelerating. This implies a qualitative shift in the way how impact is defined and measured, a change which will be assessed at community level and at the level of political decision making and international market agreements.

The CGA gives evidence that women benefit more if they have already collateral and assets. Women without access to land, water and other assets will rather chose other ways to earn cash. An option which is becoming more popular is sex work, a sector where access to short-term cash seems much easier than in other sectors.

Do agencies therefore need to change their strategies to empower women in an anti-discriminatory way? Which strategies go beyond promoting the monetised sectors and cash economy? How can small entrepreneurship be inclusive instead of fostering new inequalities among women? Can economic empowerment be realised without strengthening citizen's rights as human rights and women's rights accordingly? And what possibilities are there to include the above raised claims within the project instruments?

Reconciling program log frames with complex social realities

The management tools applied by cooperation agencies aiming at the promotion of gender equality have to account for the social complexity including the risks linked to the employment and income programmes. Logical frameworks have become one of the important tools to guarantee accountability. But log frames reduce real life social situations to a manageable set of issues, where the contradictory processes discussed earlier hardly fit into. Time is reduced to a category of

efficiency and management. Time use for work with no direct impact on economic efficiency, will neither be integrated into a monitoring system nor taken as a structuring factor for livelihoods and social change. The fact the development takes place outside these logical frameworks or other management tools to monitor the intervention impacts makes challenging the methodologies of project management indispensable. Reflecting and reviewing conventional procedures from different angles is only possible though, if there are enough resources, expertise and commitment to mainstream gender equality into programs. It is crucial to integrate the know-how and experiences, the logics and discourses of local NGOs, and other civil society organisations to reflect and review and give critical feedbacks according to their roles and objectives. Commitment however remains crucial. Changes, even radical ones regarding methodologies, beneficiaries, space of intervention or partners might need to be reconsidered.

The implementing agencies have to observe carefully the different trends as described in the CGA, in order to prevent women from becoming marginalized and discriminated in spite of their former position and level of education and participation and despite the well intended promotion of small entrepreneurship. They have to choose a (long term) frame which integrates the preconditions under which women organize their everyday life, their options to improve their time scarcity and change the burdens of responsibilities. These critical elements give evidence to existing inequalities of women and men and to the mechanisms where inequalities are reframed. If we focus on the articulation of (unpaid) care work and income generating work, the gender analysis will provide different sets of information, about how household structures are reinforced or changed by the allocation of the additional cash women provide for the household. It sheds light on intra-household relation which would remain in the dark if participation of women in the market economy remains the only criterion. Focussing on intra-household and community relations and on the way they are re-written by including women in market oriented activities shows whether the overall burden of women's responsibilities is growing. These changes sometimes occur very slowly and under the surface, small signs of change might not easily be perceived. Time is a key element; time needs to be accorded to actor groups to express themselves, to structure their space around the new elements and to reconfigure relations and meanings.

The careful longterm view on change will show how women and men deal with the new roles and how they manage the household system when time for reproductive tasks becomes scarce. The nutrition of children, for example, would give evidence about the priorities in assuming the responsibilities in a household. And an increasing school enrolment of girls might be due to the fact that less children need to work at home and specially girls could attend school because they are freed from care work. Other trends like the increasing expenditure of men in other than household relevant goods would give evidence that women are increasingly exploited in terms of labour force and time. Whether there are standard questions valuable for all different context remains a challenging open question. Not every aspect of social change can be screened and checked against gender equality standards. There are other ways of tracking the impact of development interventions

and pro poor growth activities which might rather be localized in politics than in technical approaches.

These might be commonplaces, but nevertheless, they are of particular relevance in programs aiming at income generation and promotion of small entrepreneurship in rural areas, however they are often left aside due to the atomised perception of existences by the agencies. To finish the paper we would like to shortly reflect these issues from a feminist perspective.

7. Concluding remarks

There has been a paradigm shift in development theory and practice from the perception of women as objects of charity to becoming subjects of market-oriented entrepreneurship. This notion of poor rural women as profit-maximising players in the global market portrays a reductionist view on women's social realities. In this paper, we make a case for a more comprehensive approach of development involving men and women within their everyday contexts including the difficulties they cope with. This includes the time women have left for recreation, the shift of responsibility to maintain the household economy, decision making processes, wage gaps and the production and reproduction of gender norms. Only a revised definition of economic development can meet the feminist claim for more comprehensive development approaches. The powerful paradigms of efficiency and efficacy need to be framed from a perspective which integrates gender equality mainstreaming and poverty reduction.

Efforts to target women in employment creation programmes are typically designed to enhance women's independent access to work opportunities and food or cash income. It is important that these design choices take account of the local socio-cultural contexts. Crucial questions to consider in a pre-program assessment phase include the following points adapted from Devereux (Devereux and Solomon 2006, 40): (1) Are women already active in the labour market, or are they constrained from working outside the home? (2) Will women retain control over their earnings, or be required to hand over this income to their husbands? (3) Will the time and labour requirements of the employment programme place intolerable extra burdens on women's workloads?

How can gender equality mainstreaming be organised to address these questions? In the following paragraphs we would like to present a number of thoughts to fuel the debate. The section provides a long "working list" of concluding thoughts which provides a summary of our arguments. We will discuss some of the crucial arguments and hopefully stimulate a number of ideas on how project instruments might be further refined. We will end with our personal short list arguing for what we feel are the fields where initiatives need to be prioritised.

Working list

Programs that involve women as entrepreneurs, farmers and employees should be sensitively designed so as to take into consideration the following aspects:

1. *Explicit gender equality goals and commitments to fight context-specific discrimination as well as a conceptual idea as to how transformation is induced (theory of change)*

This includes a debate on gender specific discrimination in the access to and control over assets. Such efforts are supposed to go beyond the surface, addressing structurally legitimized forms of exclusion. An example is the analysis of the influence on the redistribution of accumulated wealth. This debate may generate other information than sex disaggregated statistics. The common affirmative approach might be complemented by a transformative conception of gender equality. It is not enough if women have equal access to technologies, credits, land or know how of a local economic investment program. What they also need is the access to the generation of wealth. Women can have access to seeds, pesticides and land. Still, the main objective should not be the maximizing for a market system out of their reach in terms of redistribution, but the improvement of their livelihoods, where they can generate their own fiscal space (Kabeer 2008).

Other important aspects to measure the quality of gender mainstreaming performance are information, monitoring systems and indicators – all of which are elements of gender mainstreaming checklists most of the donors are working with. We will discuss these elements below as part of monitoring, being aware that these checklists are only one means to qualify interventions, while they do not broach the issue of gender specific discrimination let alone challenge the underlying processes.

2. *The relevant information for addressing the crucial questions informed by a feminist perspective as discussed in the paper*

The project management should further consider the way the necessary information is compiled and how it feeds into the program development.

3. *Questions on objectives and monitoring: Does the program cycle correspond to the gender objectives, and are changing gender relations part of monitoring procedures?*

The project baseline is supposed to provide the necessary information about how men and women are diversely affected by poverty and how they negotiate their situation.

The critical question is whether affirmative action accounts as a first step to close the gender gap (in a rather more pragmatic sense) or if transformative objectives are also part of the goal. This implies a political commitment and eventually induces radical changes.

However, the decision as to what strategy is implemented should be thoroughly reflected. Instead of getting entangled in far reaching goals detached from any theory of change, it is preferable to limit the objective. An affirmative redistribution of input, based on the economic model of individuals acting individually and competitively might be adequate for some situations. That's when baselines are set up with sex disaggregated data and proportional figures of the female/male participation. If the program is not limited to a merely affirmative improvement of women's situation, but aims for a more transformative redistribution of assets and power, more qualitative information will be needed. In order to find out whether women's situation including their livelihood options and economic strategies have changed in a sustainable way obviously more detailed evidence is required. Descriptive Information is strictly contextual, hardly aggregational and little comparable, features which limit its adequacy for quality assurance. However, we will need these insights in the long run to unpack hidden constraints, contradictions and trade-offs in terms of the role of state, the rights of citizens and questions of access and redistribution schemes. These enquiries will reveal more clearly where else than in the narrow project context gender difference lies at the heart of discrimination

4. Refine instruments for measuring change against pressure to reduce complexity

Experiences indicate that the number of log frames which integrate gender specific output indicators is increasing. Measurable and quantitative indicators are being developed. The challenge is not so much about how to define gender sensitive outcomes as long as we refer to the more affirmative aspect. Compared to that it will be very difficult to grasp let alone measure the rather distributive and structural aspects of change in a way that allows defining indicators for monitoring.

This is not only an issue of gender analysis and data, but also a problem of monitoring mechanisms and techniques. There is a need for complementary instruments which address change beyond the narrow scope of the project logic, opening spaces where the complexity of gender relations can be reflected and analyzed. This includes qualitative analyses, testimonies (Central America), or thick description but also the regular and systematic observation form outside the project by implementers (as another indicator), pressure groups, grassroot organization or other civil society representatives. The social observatories to monitor and critically assess the project impact as used in the Bangladeshi case, is a first step in the right direction. This however does not reveal much about the long term changes and the possible adjustments of the project for gender justice.

5. Allocate adequate budgets to promote gender justice and institutionalise quality assessment

To allow the sometimes complicated and time intensive project cycle management to be gender sensitive, the planning must include appropriate budgets. Financial means are required to provide access to expert and contextualized knowledge, guarantee the institutional space for observation, and admit the regular reflections upon change by different actors, especially women's organizations. The budget is important for gender mainstreaming in the programs,

but it is also an instrument of gender equality policy. This means that in a specific context it will be necessary not only to change the budget lines but also to allocate a specific budget to “sub-projects” or “side projects” of women’s empowerment. Project implementers are often saturated with the complex issues of gender mainstreaming and therefore prioritize technical and seemingly easy to adopt measures. The quality of gender mainstreaming might deteriorate and the outcomes in terms of gender equality fall out of scope. Only an institutionalized quality assessment system can prevent this from happening.

6. Discuss normative instruments for gender equality mainstreaming in order to transform, not just affirm women’s realities

The quality of gender equality performance is at risk when gender equality issues are standardised. Gender equality issues remain as complex as ever and will have to be elaborated and discussed over and over again – particularly with a focus on the risks and opportunities for women’s empowerment. Besides being a question of compliance this is about the trade-off between the normative assurance of a certain quality of cooperation practice and performance on the one hand and the radical claim for redistribution of economic surplus including access and control on the other. This implies profound structural changes in market, property rights and ownership structures, state schemes for social protection etc. Such a commitment is a long term venture which, due to lack of time, political pressure for more effectiveness and management constraints is at risk to fall by the wayside. The lesson learnt is that only by conceiving mainstreaming gender and political change as an interface it will be possible to transform and not just affirm women's situation.

Summing up:

In conclusion, we suggest choosing three fields of action: the political field, the economic field and the sphere of well-being. The political field includes decision making processes and women’s participation in local councils, their representation in local groups and the power they are assigned to influence decisions.

The second field of action encompasses questions on household income and distribution as well as how decisions on consumption, investment and spending are negotiated. This analysis includes scenarios of changing income and other factors of transformation. The participation of household members in local economies is scrutinised, and so are structures of subsidies, taxes and other fiscal practices.

We like to address the third field as the field of well-being. This includes social protection, access to health and education. Questions on gender based violence and the relation between generations will be addressed in an intersectional perspective.

We propose to link these three fields of action to the question of performance and systematically collect the data which is needed to address these questions according to the checklist. It goes without saying that in order to provide adequate data, to guarantee its validity and reliability and to make sure within projects the adequate know how is represented to process the qualitative information, adequate resources need to be allocated.

In the end, we are left with a problem which has surfaced as soon as the gender debate was picked up in development theory and practice. It is about our capacity to act, in other words, the challenge of reconciling the complexity of social reality with the need to comply with project procedures and to produce measurable results. Our suggestion for an experimental monitoring system aims at meeting this challenge.

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¹ Programa Postcosecha en Centroamerica; Evaluación de impacto y de la sostenibilidad, Informe de consultoría (September 1995).

² Shea tree.

³ Reports were given from microfinance program in Pakistan operated by Credit Suisse which had to be closed due to a high incidence of violence. Another Case was reported from China, where farmer's suicides made the program come to a stop. Sources: personal communications.

⁴ LEAF: A UNIQUE CASE OF GENDER EQUALITY MAINSTREAMING IN AGRICULTURE SECTOR Input Paper for IFAD workshop, SwissCooperationOffice-Bangladesh, 13.10. 08, p. 1.

⁵ LEAF: A UNIQUE CASE OF GENDER EQUALITY MAINSTREAMING IN AGRICULTURE SECTOR Input Paper for IFAD workshop, SwissCooperationOffice-Bangladesh, 13.10. 08.

⁶ CBO: Community Based Organisation.

⁷ The source of this statistical information is the baseline information for the current phase of LEAF project. LEAF only initiated the process to develop the report focusing outcome indicators in 2007, there are no information about the first phase before 2007. The overall progress is therefore only covering 2 years.

⁸ Translation in English in print.

⁹ Shea butter.

¹⁰ Statement by the chef de village de Bélénitiéni: "The shea tree is a tree which was given to us by the good God. Because it is difficult to cultivate, we, the men, have assigned its exploitation to the women. This year, the rise in market prices for the almonds leads us to reconsider our position and I think in a few years, it will be the men to exploit the shea tree." (Translation by SB).

¹¹ The assumption that local governance is less prone to producing new hierarchies has been questioned, however. Bardhan argues, that local government may more easily be captured by elites {Bardhan, #1342}.

¹² Country gender assessment of Mongolia by Ava Shrestha, and T. Undarya, Asian Development Bank 2009.