'New' Masculinities, Old Shortcomings? The Implications of a New Male Focus for Gender and Development (GAD)

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Abstract:

The perceived failure of gender and development (GAD) initiatives to adopt a truly *relational* and integrated approach to gender has meant that development agencies are increasingly interested in 'bringing men in' to their work on gender (White 2000:33). The various debates provoked by this suggestion and the relevance of such debates for re-thinking current approaches to GAD serve as the focus of this essay. The following questions are addressed: *Why have men been missing from GAD? What are the advantages of granting men and masculinities a more central focus in GAD? Are there any disadvantages?* Drawing on specific case studies and on secondary literature, I argue that whilst there are benefits to be gained, for both men and women, from the greater integration of men into GAD, there also exist potential trade-offs for women. I conclude that a relational approach to gender, which includes a focus on the productive lives of men as gendered subjects, as well as on those of women, is fundamental to the success of any development effort in promoting long-term gender equality and equity.

Introduction:

The widespread adoption of a 'Gender and Development' (GAD) perspective by international development agencies in the 1980s signalled a theoretical shift in development discourse and practice away from essentialised notions and sex-related divisions of gender roles, towards a more *relational* concept of gender. The moving force behind this shift was the perceived failure of previous theoretical frameworks for gender analysis in development such as 'Women in Development' (WID) in the early 1970s, and later 'Women and Development' (WAD) in the late 1970s, to effectively challenge existing gender inequalities. GAD presented itself as an alternative 'gender analysis framework' for the study of development-related aspects of social life such as intra-household relations, divisions of labour, control over and access to land and resources (Visvanathan et al eds. 1997:20). It emphasised gender *relations* rather than 'women' as a category of analysis. From a GAD perspective, gender was de-naturalised, understood as a social construct, the meanings of which were fluid and changing.

> One of the basic conceptual premises of GAD is that, as a dynamic social construct, gender is shaped not only by a multiplicity of interacting time- and place-contingent influences (culture, mode of production, legal and political institutions, for example), but is further mediated by men's and women's insertion into other socially generated categories such as class, age and "race" (Moser 1993:3 in Chant 2000:8).

More recently, GAD has faced criticism from gender theorists (See Jackson, 2001; Chant 2000), among others, who are unconvinced that GAD has provided any alternative to the shortcomings of WID. One major critique has problematised the marginalisation of men from GAD policy and practice and the continued, almost exclusive, focus on women rather than on gender. Still today, in the literature and reports of development agencies and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) throughout the world, the terms 'gender' and 'women' are often used interchangeably as if one were synonymous with the other (Kaufman 2003:3). The perceived failure of GAD to adopt a truly *relational* and integrated approach has meant that development agencies are becoming increasingly interested to 'bring men in' to work on gender (White 2000:33). The various debates provoked by this suggestion and the relevance

of such debates for re-thinking current approaches to gender and development will serve as the focus of this essay.

Firstly, I will sketch a brief outline of feminist critiques of WID and GAD as theoretical frameworks for development policy and practice. Secondly, I will attempt a discussion of the following questions: *Why have men been missing from GAD? What are the advantages of granting men and masculinities a more central focus in GAD? Are there any disadvantages?* Drawing on particular case studies and on secondary literature, I argue that whilst there are benefits to be gained, for both men and women, from the greater integration of men into GAD, there also exist potential trade-offs for women. In conclusion, however, I contend that a *relational* approach to gender that includes a focus on the productive lives of men as gendered subjects, as well as on those of women, is fundamental to the success of any development effort in promoting long-term gender equality and equity[1]. Due to the limited scope of this paper, considerations of *macro* level political and economic processes that may impose constraints upon the efficacy of GAD policy and practice will not be discussed.

WID and GAD: Strengths and Weaknesses

Up until 1970, dominant development paradigms had not entirely excluded women from development projects but had included them on sex-specific terms which 'invisibilised' their roles as productive agents within their economies and societies (Kabeer 1994). Kabeer notes, 'While men entered the policy process as household-heads and productive agents, women were viewed primarily in their capacity as house-wives, mothers and "at-risk" reproducers' (Kabeer 1994). WID emerged at this time, drawing strength from Boserup's (1970) seminal publication 'Woman's Role in Economic Development', as a theoretical framework which challenged such orthodox ways of thinking about women and work. WID emphasised women's economic and productive roles and drew attention to the ways in which male-biased approaches in development project design and planning had grossly underestimated women's productive activities both ideologically and statistically (Beneria 1981 in Nelson 1981:10). Such male-bias, it was argued, had ensured that the diffusion of benefits from economic development processes had largely by-passed women. For WID advocates, the need to integrate women into the development process, because of the contribution they could make to it, was paramount.

Despite the success of WID in placing women firmly on the development agenda, its close links with modernisation theory and neo-classical economics, rooted in a hegemonic western liberal world-view targeting individuals as the catalysts for social change, formed the basis of major feminist critiques towards the end of the 1970s (Kabeer 1994). Furthermore, WID was viewed as non-confrontational in that it accepted existing social structures and power relations and was focused primarily on the provision of 'practical' rather 'strategic' needs to women. In this way, it failed to challenge the *sources* of women's subordination (Visvanathan 1997:19). By making use of dichotomous gender frameworks, WID obscured the ways in which power and difference are reproduced through social *relations* and interactions (Reid 1995 in Visvanathan 1997:24).

The limitations of WID's potential to transform the position of women in society, and also in development itself, led to the emergence of GAD in the 1980s. Proponents of this

[1] Gender *equality* refers to the equal treatment of males and females in law and in civil society. Gender *equity* refers to fairness. For example, gender *equality* implies that a pregnant woman should have equal opportunities in the work place. However, gender *equity* suggests that temporary unequal treatment from a male or other female colleagues may be necessary in order to meet her specific needs and take account of her pregnancy (Kaufman 2003:2).

perspective sought to move beyond the separational gender dichotomies and unilateral focus that had characterised much of WID. For example, GAD practitioners studied gender divisions of labour rather than women and production. One of the key aims of this approach was to reveal and potentially alter, through appropriate development methods and practices, the *power* relations implied by gender as a socially constructed identity (Chant 2000:8). It also called for the integration of a gender perspective at all levels of development activity (2000:8) and aimed to promote men's role as potential supporters of women in an attempt to overcome a major constraint facing WID: the commonly held perception among men and women that gender movements imply a reversal of traditional roles and the gaining of power by women *over* men rather than bringing about equity between women and men (Tadele 1999:35).

As GAD enters its third decade, it is clear that it still has a long way to go in fulfilling its promise to promote a more integrated and relational approach to gender. Analyses of men as gendered beings, their perceptions of the relationships they have with women and with other men have been largely missing from the GAD agenda. Recent contributions to GAD debates have emphasised the importance of a male-inclusive approach (Chant 2003; Jackson 2001) and drawn attention to the ways in which GAD practice and policy, based on hegemonic gender ideologies, has negated the diversity of men and masculinities. Consequently, reciprocities and interdependencies between men and women, among men and among women, have been and continue to be overlooked (Jackson 2001). As a result, GAD has been unable to engage effectively with the processes, at both macro and micro level, which produce and reproduce gender identities and inequalities. In the following sections, I will discuss the various arguments for and against the move to include a 'new' male focus in GAD. Firstly, however, I will explore some of the reasons why men have been 'missing' from the GAD agenda.

Why Have Men Been 'Missing' From GAD?

According to Hearn, placing men and the associated concept of 'masculinity' on political and policy agendas is of course not really new; it is just that policy makers and development practitioners are now *naming* men and masculinities as an object of concern (Hearn 1998 in Popay et al. 1998). One of the main reasons for the absence of men as a recognised constituency in GAD so far has been, according to Chant, the historical legacy of WID. Many GAD practitioners are those who were previously active in feminist struggles for the advancement of women and for whom bringing about gender equality and equity means bringing women up to the levels of well-being enjoyed by men in their households and communities before men can lay claim to limited GAD resources (Chant & Gutmann 2000).

A further factor behind the 'exclusion' of men is the continued prevalence of patriarchal values and practices within development agencies and in the communities within which they work (Chant & Gutmann 2000; Crewe & Harrison 1998:49). The idea that men are already incorporated in and catered for by development, precluding the need for a specialised focus on them is common among GAD practitioners (Chant & Gutmann 2000:23). An interesting observation is that it is predominantly women who are pressing for a more male-inclusive GAD agenda (Chant 2000; White 2000). Why is this? Might men have a vested interest in resisting changes in gender relations? Kaufman suggests that men may be opposed to working towards gender equality for ideological reasons, because of unquestioned assumptions, or, on a more conscious level, to preserve entrenched privileges (Kaufman 2003:3).

On a more practical level, the complicated concept of gender as *relational* and contested is less easily incorporated into development planning than the 'add on' WID approach that preceded it and often requires action beyond the limited time and resources of development agencies (Chant & Gutmann 2000:20). Notions of 'cultural relativity' have also fuelled resistance towards GAD, which is perceived as interfering with or worse still, challenging local cultural beliefs about gender (2000:20). I will return to some of the above issues in the following sections where I will argue that they can be seen to support, rather than warn against the inclusion of men in GAD. The arguments discussed below, relating to the advantages of a 'new' male focus in GAD, will be split into two categories, *Theoretical* and *Pragmatic*.

Theoretical Advantages of a 'New' Male Focus in GAD:

The arguments relating to the *theoretical* advantages of a 'new' male focus in GAD emphasise the importance of a relational perspective in gender analysis. The arguments are, on the whole, defensive in character, highlighting the problems that result from the exclusion of men from gender analysis. They point to the nature of GAD as a discursive formation and to the ways in which, despite the terminological shift from WID to GAD, development discourse continues to reproduce structural gender dichotomies that reinforce hegemonic associations of men with power, lazyness and self-interest; women with subordination, heavy work burdens and altruism. Drawing on case study material, the arguments outlined below support the notion that men are often be 'subaltern casualties' of hegemonic ideas about masculinity (Jackson 2001:2).

In her article, 'Continuities and Discontinuities in Political Constructions of the Working Man in Rural Sub-Saharan Africa: The 'Lazy Man' in African Agriculture', Whitehead states that, "In attempts to make African women's work visible, where once it was not, some analysts have slipped into representing African rural men as not doing very much at all" (2001:23). She argues that the construction of the African 'lazy man' is a highly politicised discourse, employed at different times by colonial regimes, development workers and by African people themselves for different historical and political purposes. For the purpose of this essay, however, her description of the more recent role this representation has played in informing and shaping time-use research on men and women's work in rural Zambia (Allen 1988 in Whitehead 2001:) which featured in a World Bank report on Gender and Poverty , will be examined.

Based on data from 13 households, both male and female-headed, in Mabumba in the rural province of Luapula, Zambia, the research concluded that Luapula women are engaged in much more productive and reproductive activity than men. Such a conclusion, Whitehead argues, is contingent on the researcher's decision to classify productive work as including farming, wage employment, business and household maintenance activities. Firstly, Whitehead maintains that domestic maintenance work is very much a female domain in Mabumba, so its classification as productive work, together with farming, waged work and business, emphasises the imbalance between men and women's input to productive work (2001:36). This, she argues, coupled with a narrow focus on agricultural activities, serves to exaggerate the differences in workloads between men and women by underplaying men's indirect contributions to farming through off-farm activities (2001:37).

A different picture is painted when the categories are re-worked by Whitehead so that productive work is divided into three categories: farming, other economic activity and household work. The 'other economic activity' category, now including foraging, working

for others, employment and business (2001:35), enable Whitehead to take better account of the economic strategies of rural households which aim to buffer climatic and market risks by engaging in the non-farm sector. As Whitehead puts it:

> A narrow focus on labour use in farming, as in Allen's account of the female nature of Mabumba farming, misses these important linkages between on-farm and off-farm activities and their importance for the farming enterprise. This implies that men's activities are not connected to the livelihood of the household. It also results in an exaggerated picture of inequality in the relative inputs of men and women to the success of the farming enterprise (Whitehead 2001:37).

Whitehead's critique of Allen's research methodology, outlined above, provides an example of how conventional, dichotomous assumptions about gender roles in Zambia have influenced GAD practice in ways that have under-represented men's contribution to the household livelihood. Such gender-representations, in turn, serve to reinforce dichotomous gender models. Seen in this way, Whitehead's observations can be said to support a theoretical shift towards a more *relational* perspective in GAD; one that further incorporates the subjective experiences of men, as well as women, in their working lives.

The exercise of power is another gendered process about which dichotomous assumptions are made. Assumptions about male dominance and patriarchy are common in GAD and gender divisions of labour are, according to Jackson, broadly thought of in development discourses as disadvantageous to women, largely excluding them from the formal exercise of *power* (2001:2). Male identities on the other hand, are generally thought to offer privileged access to employment and to the power that flows from the control of wages and other resources. Jackson argues that such assumptions can lead to over-simplified ideas about the work of men as elective and the work of women as non-elective:

> Women are not assigned to positions in processes of production and reproduction entirely by the imperatives of an all-powerful patriarchy, nor do men freely choose the nature, content and extent of the domestic production they engage in by virtue of their gender (Jackson 2001:4).

Supportive of this idea is Kabeer's ethnography, 'The Power to Choose: Bangladeshi Women and Labour Market Decisions in London and Dhaka', in which she explores some of the ways in which women exercise choice and power in their labour market decisions. Through a micro-level analysis of the lives of individuals and families, their motivations for taking up work and the 'transformatory potential' of women's wage-earning for intra-household relations, Kabeer challenges the simple equation of men with power. Promoting an agency-centred, rather than structural model of power, she privileges 'choice' rather than 'control' over resources as the basis for exploring the gendered distribution of power and the potential of women's wages to transform gender relations (2000). She describes how women exercise power in 'hidden' ways that do not overtly challenge traditional patriarchal structures and hierarchies. She also considers the different kinds of choices that are made possible for women as a result of their ability to earn. For example, she describes how a female informant, Salma, decided to keep back some of her wages each month to put into a clandestine bank account which she had opened in her own name. Such a decision, prompted by the fear of being deserted by her husband for failing to provide children, gave Salma a sense of security in a world that, for her, was fraught with uncertainty. Kabeer's research findings challenge the above-mentioned conventional gender-based dichotomies of power/powerlessness and, in doing so, support a move towards a more integrated approach to

GAD. They emphasise the importance of a *relational* concept of gender for understanding the distribution of power between men and women.

Jackson refers to another gender dichotomy commonly found in GAD literature that unfavourably contrasts selfish men spending money on personal consumption with altruistic women who spend it for family welfare or (2001:10). She rightly suggests that,

> A move away from the potentially essentialising effects of these generalisations, through considering the importance to the performance of masculinity of demonstrating generosity at male gatherings, and the possibility that there may be wider benefits for others from successful gender performance by men, would be welcome (2001:10).

She also questions whether or not a focus on gender *divisions* of labour is an appropriate tool for analysis in GAD given its emphasis on the separations, rather than on the *interdependencies* of men and women's productive lives (2001:5). Perhaps a greater focus on men's subjective experiences of work, leisure, money etc. and the ways in which these reinforce or contradict hegemonic ideas about masculinities and femininities, would improve our understanding of gender *relations* promote the avoidance, in GAD of inaccurate, over-simplistic representations of gendered subjects.

The Pragmatic Benefits of Bringing Men Into Development:

Bringing men into development also has *pragmatic* advantages for both men and women. Fears that a 'new' focus on men in development will be disadvantageous to women are based on dichotomous 'see-saw' pre-conceptions of gender roles. These not only risk denying women the pragmatic benefits to be gained from men's empowerment, but also ignore situations in which the interests of men and women are aligned[2]. Men are not a homogenous group and far from benefiting equally from patriarchy, they benefit unequally and in some cases not at all. Gender is not always the principal form of subordination (White 2000) as individual experiences of power or powerlessness are also contingent on other social categories of age, class, caste, ethnicity or race, all of which constitute, to a greater or lesser extent, a person's experience of their gender. Further discussion of the mutually constitutive nature of these social categories cannot be explored fully within the narrow scope of this essay, however, its relevance to sustainable GAD practice and policy is acknowledged. Below, a participatory research project that explored the attitudes of men towards sexual and reproductive health in Nicaragua (Sternberg 2000) serves as a starting point for a discussion of the *pragmatic* advantages, for both men and women, of a male inclusive approach to GAD. Given that the extensive and wide-ranging results of the research cannot be afforded space in this essay, what follows is a brief discussion of the implications of this kind of research for re-thinking the status of men in GAD.

The Nicaraguan population is at risk because of its young demographic profile, high fertility rate and low or irregular use of contraception (PASCA 1997 in Sterberg 2000:91). In recent years men's participation in sexual health promotion has been seen by many as a promising strategy (Drennon 1998 in Sternberg 2000:89). In 1996, the Centro de Informacion y Servicios de Asesoria en Salud (CISAS), a Nicaraguan health promotion NGO, began working with groups of men to encourage them to share responsibility with women for promoting sexual health. Interestingly, such a strategy was adopted mainly in response to

[2] Lynch, K. <Kathleen.lynch@ucd.ie> 'The Value of Gender Equality for Men and Boys' 2003 <http://esaconf.un.org/~gender-equality-role-men-boys/guests> (6 Jan. 2004)

demands by women from poor communities who were very much aware of the importance of working with men in order to achieve social change.

The Nicaraguan context is one in which social and cultural norms, and therefore sexual and reproductive practices, are defined by *machismo*. According to Sternberg, there is no English word which adequately translates this term but he describes it as "…a cult of the male; a heady mixture of paternalism, aggression, systematic subordination of women, fetishism of women's bodies, and idolisation of their reproductive and nurturing capacities, coupled with a rejection of homosexuality", (2000:91). As Sternberg acknowledges, using machismo to explain or excuse men's behaviour is problematic, not only because the cultural values to which it refers are constantly being redefined, but also because of the nature of machismo as a stereotypical model of men and women's behaviour which individuals may or may not adhere to (2000:96). Despite this, CISAS hoped that by helping Nicaraguan men to understand how *machismo* operates as a system in their lives, they could empower them to take steps to alter the oppressive structures and power relationships which lead individual men to put themselves and others at risk (2000:90).

The idea that a man's role is that of financial provider and adulterer was common among CISAS's male research participants. There was also a general consensus among the men that the use of contraception is not a man's responsibility. Aside from the health risks, for both men and women, involved in the performance of Nicaraguan masculinity (namely the transmission of STDs such as HIV and/or unwanted pregnancy leading in many cases to illegal abortion (2000:91)), it is clear that men experience pressure to live up to hegemonic 'provider' roles associated with masculinity. More general research on men in Latin America has revealed that growing insecurity and the marginalisation of men from employment and education, coupled with an increase in the paid employment of women and in the number of female-headed households, (Chant 2000:8; Hearn in Popay et al. 1998) has meant that men are facing declining prospects of fulfilling the socially idealised, normative role of 'household breadwinner' (Chant & Craske 2003:225).

A pervasive sense of failure, psychological disorders, alcohol abuse and (Jackson 2001:13) and domestic violence are just some of the ways in which male anxieties about their gendered status within their households and communities can manifest themselves. As Chant and Gutmann note, men's anxieties about the fragility of their livelihoods, in the light of rising unemployment, can have negative implications, not only for men and women, but also for the success of development projects (2000:25). Development projects in places as diverse as Greece, Kenya and Honduras, aimed at raising women's access to income in situations where men have difficulty in being breadwinners, have often been unsuccessful due to the defensive responses of men to what they regarded as 'threats' posed by improvements in women's economic status. These defensive responses have included the taking over of projects, controlling the income women derive from them, and/or, as a further backlash, increasing their authority and control within the home (2000:25).

In the context of this essay, Sternberg's research in Nicaragua is important in that it demonstrates clearly how processes of patriarchy result in the subordination, albeit in different ways, of *both* men and women. The active involvement of men in projects aiming to improve gender equality can have pragmatic advantages. Firstly, women are relieved of the sole responsibility for altering gender *relations* (Sternberg 2000). Secondly, men stand to benefit emotionally, physically and mentally both from their inclusion in a project, and from an increased awareness of their options in terms of careers, life styles and general ways of being. Recognising not just instances of male power, but also those of male vulnerability is

therefore essential to ensuring that *both* genders can benefit from development activities promoting, for example, sexual health and/or the reduction of domestic violence.

A Note of Caution:

The above sections have served to highlight the many benefits of a 'new' male focus in GAD. However, it is also important to be aware of potential dangers. It must be noted that whilst it is crucial to avoid essentialist gender dualisms and to acknowledge the ability of individuals to exercise agency, too strong a focus on the subjectivities of men and women as agents may risk a passive acceptance of the status quo. It is important that an agency-centred approach to the analysis of gender and power does not go too far in legitimising non-equitable hierarchies of power that are disadvantageous to women.

White voices concerns about the potential trade-offs for women of straying from the standard feminist focus in GAD. She warns that turning attention to men may allow the 'reinscription of patriarchal explanations which lie conveniently close to hand' (White 2000:35). This danger is heightened by calls for a 'new' focus on *men* and *masculinities* rather than on gender *relations*. Another cause for concern is the assumption that women in development have been 'done' and all that is needed now is to 'bring men in' (2000:35). This point is neatly expressed by White's question 'If our analysis of gender was so mistaken as to "leave out" the whole of the male sex, can it be that the understandings of women that it produced need no adjustment?' (2000:35), suggesting that the current move to incorporate male subjectivities into GAD is indicative of a general area of analysis which should now be explored for women too.

Finally, an increased focus on men will take us only part of the way towards a theoretically more accurate discourse in GAD. Incorporating men will not solve the problematic of gender discourse as 'sex-dressed' (2000:37). Although the evolution from WID to GAD represented a move away from essentialist discourses of sex-related divisions of gender roles, towards an understanding of the meanings of sex and gender as socially constructed and fluid, the above examples have shown that hegemonic dualisms that tie men and women into essentially opposed groups still persist.

Conclusion

Given the broad nature of this topic, it is more than likely that the conclusions drawn from this paper will lead to more questions than answers. Nevertheless, I will attempt to summarise the main points: Firstly, I have suggested that a 'new' focus on men and masculinities is a necessary component of a theoretically sound approach to GAD. Such an assertion is based on a rejection of dichotomous approaches to gender which have served to perpetuate both the unilateral focus on women in development and the under-representation of men's activities and subjectivities in GAD. Whitehead's critique of development research in Mabumba served to demonstrate the way in which, in informing development practice, such dualisms are themselves reproduced. It would appear that GAD, as a discursive formation, constitutes gender in a way that has perpetuated men's exclusion from development by reifying them as powerful, lazy and/or irresponsible subjects who neither need, nor truly deserve to benefit from development's limited resources. Here, I suggest that an alternative discourse to that of '*Gender* And Development' (GAD) is required; one that leaves no room for dichotomous, sex-linked assumptions about men and women. Establishing the nature of

this discourse will require time and further research into the ways in which development processes constitute gender.

Secondly, I have argued that there are pragmatic advantages to be gained from the inclusion of men and boys as gendered subjects in GAD. Such advantages might include, among other things, emotional and physical well-being, the reduction of violence towards women and/or the improvement of sexual health for men and women, brought about through consciousness raising activities. Finally, feminist concerns about a male-inclusive approach as a two-edged sword, potentially giving men the keys to more subtle forms of domination and exploitation, should not go unheeded (Sternberg 2000). Nor must a shift towards the increased integration of men and masculinities in GAD go too far in diverting policy and practice away from a *relational* approach. A future theoretical framework for gender analysis in development must nurture a far more inclusive and empathetic approach to men without losing sight of the very real consequences of patriarchal structures for women. Only then can development policy and practice have a real chance of success both in promoting equality and equity and in preventing gender discrimination for all gendered beings.

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