

## **Why is further research necessary to properly understand the potential negative impacts that female - centric development work may have on men?**

### **Abstract**

This paper explores the evidence for more detailed research into whether the focus in development work on women and girls may have negatively impacted men and boys- as either the targeted clients in development work, or actors on the periphery. It begins by analysing the existing literature on gender in development and outlines the extent to which much of the dialogue has been about mainstreaming men into gender equality work and 'bringing them in'. It narrates the shift of focus from the singular goal of female empowerment to a wider, more encompassing recognition that men also play a crucial role in the shared goal of improving the lives of both women and men. Nevertheless, there exists a disparity between these inclusive attitudes towards the role of men and the breadth of their identities and, based on existing literature and case studies from South America and Africa, the reality of work in the development space. It then goes on to emphasise the fragmented nature of existing development work and the need for further, more detailed studies into the relationship between female - centric development work and the possible subsequent, peripheral effect on men and their positions in society through a possible 'feedback loop'.

The theme of human capital has been selected to demonstrate that, according to existing evidence, men may even be the social actors who evidence the highest levels of vulnerability to disempowerment and change. Existing studies show that men are not immune to social change in their ability to find, undertake and keep work. It is far from pre- determined and immune from external influence. By framing the outcomes of previous studies, it asks whether the singular nature of gender- focused programmes with women are in some way contributing to, or exacerbating, the vulnerability and loss of male human capital.

A large body of literature is dedicated to identify how women and girls may lose their own agency in a gendered, largely patriarchal global society. It has ultimately led to extensive development interventions that aim to redress a balance for women against men in all areas of life- from the political, economic, to the macro and micro. This paper examines this literature and suggests that this may have effectively led to the essentialisation of men, restricting for some time comparable investigation into the experiences of men as a plurality of gendered beings. Furthermore, development work in practice may have failed to take into account whether men themselves - as a community or individual within a largely dominant masculine corpus- may be lacking agency themselves. If the assumption is made that men are always dominant and empowered, then the effects of female - centric may be damaging men. Utilising the example of human capital, where men often are quite the opposite of the dormant, powerful group they are considered to be, it is possible to demonstrate the possibility that a negative feedback loop could be created and the effects of female development work on the men of that community must be investigated further to properly understand the potential effects.

The early work of gender analysis to inform development practice was *women in development* (WID) literature, which studied the issues women faced in relation to the economic and political goals highlighted by development discourse at the time. Commentators can trace a trajectory towards *gender and development* (GAD), which views gender more holistically, rather than as men and women being two separate categories (Moser, 1993, p.14). Contemporary GAD literature consistently recognises that consideration needs to be given to the wider relational and contextual aspects of women's lives, namely those boys and men who form important figures in their personal networks. It is recognised that social and economic links between the genders makes it impossible to divorce the two for the convenience of social development programmes.

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The greater inclusiveness painted by the second approach is largely positive. However, the desire to include men and boys is described from the position of theorists and practitioners still working almost entirely for the further emancipation of women, and often neglects the investigation of male existence and identities in themselves. Although there is literature surrounding men and masculinities, much of it concerns whether men should gain entry to development work with women or explores of the 'issue' of masculinity in relation to female empowerment. There have been studies of 'being men' and masculinities - but not so of how they are influenced and shaped by development work with women and girls. Furthermore, there lacks understanding of how men and masculinities are borne in relation to development intervention working specifically on women's issues.

Furthermore, there has been a clear discussion in literature about the positioning of men in relation to women, and how that should be acknowledged by development projects. Additionally, a smaller area has questioned whether men are considered to encompass only a narrow range of possible identities. However, there lacks a study *from the position of men* on how well gender- centric development programmes meet their needs within society - or indeed, create further problems for them and the aims of the programme overall.

Chant & Gutmann (2002) emphasise the "relatively little systematic knowledge of men and their gendered beliefs and practices upon which to dependably rely." However, the situation extends beyond having an insight into behaviours and practices with which to analyse. Investigation into the experience of men has been conducted mainly through case studies. These have largely sought to unpack the reasons for negative behaviour that impact upon women and recognises that work informs the fundamental roles taken by men. This systematic failure to inform GAD work in *practice* means that up to one half of invested parties are essentially a grey area. Without understanding men as thoroughly as women, the entire impact of development work is unknown and narrow. It highlights the need for further studies to deepen the understanding the reality of being a man within the social reality of a complex web of economic and social relations, rather than as a homogenous binary existing in gendered isolation.

To exemplify this, the investigation of male human capital has been further explored and the utility of research methods considered. The example of human capital offers a specific development theme, such as livelihoods or health promotion. It can show how the failure to understand men in an equivocal manner to women could both negatively impact men and the overall well-being of the area all together.

The accumulation and retention of human capital by society connects educational achievement with living standards and concepts of economic progress. The ability to invest in skills and attributes is distinctly different from the simple barter exchange of labour with income. Furthermore, the development of health protection and prevention- such as less dangerous work or the reduction of risk taking, is largely removed from the treatment of disease. As such, human capital is broadly disaggregated into soft (often employable) skills and health improvement/ maintenance. The OECD defines human capital as, "knowledge, skills, competencies and attributes embodied in individuals that facilitate the creation of personal, social and economic well-being," (2001).

Particular issues surrounding the loss of male human capital are well represented, and perhaps even criticised as becoming increasingly subjects of rhetoric - such as that of boys always being disadvantaged in education (Rowan et al., 2002). Nevertheless, within the framework of human capital there is evidence to suggest that men are *ab initio* in a weaker position when attaining and preserving skills and attributes that are beneficial for their health and well - being.

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A programme targeting a single gender in a seemingly unrelated area may well, given the interrelated nature of human existence, render some sort of impact on men. Given the evidence that men may well be *vulnerable* in certain areas, it could be reasonably assumed that any kind of negative feedback mechanism could result in adverse effects. Similarly, programmes focussed on men to resolve such vulnerable areas could, if women are poorly integrated into the programme, create a feedback loop that affects women.

Chevannes (2006), Fuller (2003) and Olavarria (2006) explore the meaning of labour for men, particularly in the context of livelihoods and social/familial obligation. They detail the social expectations for men to find and maintain income streams, which can often be linked to the notion of becoming a man, or reaching adulthood. For example, Olavarria explores the differences between the personal and private spheres in Latin America, contrasting between that laid down by the Napoleonic codes and present day realities. He concludes that labour is pivotal to contemporary life and certainly so for men and their social positioning. The private sphere, previously the domain of men (whilst the personal was women), has become increasingly opened to women - including through development projects aimed at development the agency of women in work.

A plethora of studies readily highlight the outcome of uncertain economic futures and social roles on men. They primarily point to increased alcohol consumption, violence and other. Notably, data is collected on the impact on women and children; very little investigation into the root cause of the sickness inflicting men is conducted. For example, Amuyunzu- Nyamongo & Francis (2006) comprehensively explored the effect of changing routes of livelihood for men, against a background of development work to help women develop financial autonomy. The 'feedback loop' of increased violence was presented entirely in relation to women. Whilst abhorrent, little enquiry into bettering the situation for men in rural Kenya was conducted; the learning referred, again, to educating men out of violence and alcoholism, whilst ignoring their own contextual experiences. Amuyunzu – Nyamongo & Francis report anecdotal evidence that many societies consider men more resilient, which is often emphasised when reflected against the perceived fragility of women. Drawing away any support for change in an area considered male, but which is ultimately changing, has the potential for propagating the negative behaviours described by these reports.

Chevannes' (2006, p.91) work similarly explores the social role of men and is led to work and providing a livelihood for both self and family. He offers a link between vulnerable human capital and labour, noting that boys benefit socially from becoming providers early on and consequently, "tend to undervalue education and opt for quick financial returns in the labour market."

Fuller (2003) investigates this relationships between men and work, in the context of Peru. Her study sets out against a concern that studies men's reactions to social and economic change often cast them in an essentialist and pathologised manner. Her interviews with young and older men in Lima reiterated the overwhelming social expectations for men to be active in the labour market. Mead (1995) expands this to explain that even when individuals can choose, their apparent free choice is not totally free as there is also the need to take social constraint and cultural affection into consideration.

Comparative statistics are available on health and educational levels, alongside anecdotal evidence that men are treated more resiliently than women. However, it has not been established whether there is a causal link between the vulnerability of male human capital and if it undermines other social development work along or alongside gender lines.

So, it is possible to conclude that changing societies, exacerbated by direct development interventions, can negatively impact on men as their positions vis à vis women change. However, the real depth of

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enquiry should deal with how best to establish whether a 'feedback loop' is being created and worsening the experiences of men. As such, perhaps the key to unpacking the link between male identity and its relation with GAD programmes appears to be offering men and boys a voice to express their own experience of masculinity in relation to their direct experience of female empowerment work. As Gary Barker (cited in Chant and Gutmann, 2002) notes, men are confused by the meanings of masculinities (particularly amongst the change being driven by female empowerment) and are requesting opportunities in which to discuss and deal with changes they experience.

Since so little is understood about the change from fixed, patriarchal identities and behavior to more fluid ones that compliment the work being done with women, the chance to open the forum with men will offer a depth of qualitative data. Crucially, men in close social proximity to women participating in gender empowerment work will have recent experience to draw on.

Despite the notable writing on masculinity and theorisation of its relations with GAD, Alan Grieg (in Chant & Gutmann, p.146, 2002) points out that, "examining masculinity and the role it plays in the development process is not simply an analytical exercise." It must go further by opening the floor to men to express their personal and collective experiences. However, there lacks a close enough study of the actual **experiences** of individual men privileged by patriarchal power structures- and how masculine identity is changing under the pressure of change from social development work with women. The vast majority of work on gender talks about 'training' men- often including rhetoric about sacrificing an entire generation to work on the next.

Gender and identity, like masculinity and femininity, are relational constructs. The exploration of the breadth of femininity has made gains in breaking some of the negative socio and economic expectations associated with socially - ascribed gender. Failing to undertake equivocal work with masculine roles is dangerous, since men can increasingly see the work being done with female gender roles. Without the same framework their own positions are unclear and unsteady.

This paper has explored the possibility that a focus on one side of the gender binary by development programmes may have resulted in a negative 'feedback loop' of unanticipated, undesirable effects on both men and women. It acknowledges the risk of assuming causation between a fledgling inquiry into masculine existences, such as that around human capital, and possible effects of gender programmes uninformed by a detailed insight into the experiences and adaptive techniques used by men during periods of social change. However, it argues a need for further studies with men and human capital related enquiries to be undertaken in order to better understand.

2, 053 Words

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### Bibliography

Amuyunzu-Nyamongo, M. & Francis, P. (2006) Collapsing livelihoods and the crisis of masculinity in rural Kenya. In Bannon, I & Correia, M. (eds) *The other half of gender: Men's issues in development*. The World Bank. pp 219-244.

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Van der Gaag, N. (2011) 'Cooking up a storm', *New Internationalist*, 444 July/ August, p. 15.

The paper frames some of the key issues surrounding gender and development in a thought provoking and novel manner, rather than focusing on narrower feminist perspectives. As highlighted, there has been much discussion on 'bringing men in' to discussions of gender in development and more evidence of this would benefit this paper. Moreover, it is not as straightforward as the argument made that male disempowerment has inevitably taken place owing to women- and girl-centric development programmes and policies. The paper would also benefit from a little more background on the rise of gendered- approaches to, and readings of, development. Think link with human capital approaches is an interesting idea but needs to be fleshed out

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further and, in general, this paper would benefit from a more detailed analysis and explanation of the key theoretical discussions that it does well to raise. While the paper is well written at the outset, it would have benefitted from a consistently high standard throughout and the structure goes awry about halfway through with seemingly unrelated sections following one another. This paper is a laudable effort at addressing an important – and in some ways controversial – issue but would benefit hugely from having a little more time spent on it.

### **Cathy**

I think the main challenge that faces you now is revising the structure and unpacking some parts in more detail. You may be able to sort page 1 out with a few sub headings and page 4 looks quite good. I think page 2 and 3 need the most attention. I don't have any detailed comments, but here are some general ones that might be useful for other papers and essay writing in the future.

- Make clear where the abstract ends - I wasn't sure where the main paper started and assumed it was para 3 - that looks like an intro. There are shifts in direction at the start of page 1 paras 3 and 4 and the reasons for that need to be clearer

- \* As a general rule of thumb try to define and unpack any theoretical concepts you use the first time you use them in the main body of the text. In this case human capital needs more explanation earlier on. Maybe some of the structural problems would resolve themselves if you moved the discussion of human capital on page 2 to the intro section? Am not sure, but it might work.

- \* Your own voice and use of passive tense. I got a bit confused in places about whether you were referring to your own analysis or that of other authors. While sign posting and telling readers what you have done and where you are going can be helpful, it is an art and really good writers don't seem to need to bother to do much explicitly! I suggest that you deconstruct the work of authors you really like and see how they handle 'signposting'. Sometimes writing in the first person can make it easier, though that is still unorthodox within economics, so needs careful thought.

- I felt that the first para at the top of page 2 in which you make reference to several bodies of literature needs unpacking and would benefit from more reference to examples.

- Choice of literature. Some of the literature discussed is quite dated - I was expecting to see more reference to the Masculinities book edited by Andrea and Jerker last year, one article is mentioned in the bibliography but am not sure whether it is in the text?

- \* Also, have you seen this - Collette's work might be of wider interest Doing Development with Men: Some

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Reflections on a Case Study from Mali  
Colette Harris

<http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1759-5436.2006.tb00322.x/abstract>

BTW - Are you pursuing an interest in human capital (rather than human capability which is arguably better suited to exploring relational aspects such as the disempowering psychological effects of women's empowerment on men) because you intend to take your work forward in economics where there has been less interest in masculinities? Did you see

[http://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/p010jyb8/Why\\_Poverty\\_Solar\\_Mamas/](http://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/p010jyb8/Why_Poverty_Solar_Mamas/)? I happened to see it last night and found the relationships between the central character and his wife and how that was framed by the guy at the ministry of envt and indeed the editors of the programme fascinating. The role of the male relatives accompanying the women to the training in India was also really interesting.