Gender and development in Zambia. Empowerment of women through local non-governmental organisations
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1. INTRODUCTION

"Today most countries in Sub-Saharan Africa lie somewhere between collapse and full potential, and only a rededicated partnership for serious and coordinated action can prevent the collapse and unlock the potential."

The Global Coalition for Africa (1992)

Disappointment about the apparent failure of development models for bringing economic progress and a better quality of life to men and women in Southern Africa revitalised thinking on the concept of development. What is 'development' and what should it bring to a country and its people?

The growing gap between the rich and the poor, between the haves and the have-nots, the lack of proper housing facilities, the inadequacy of the health service and the non-availability of medicines, and the lack of good quality education in many southern African countries not only is a sign of the economic downfall of these countries, it also provides a fertile basis for social and political unrest in society. The high expectations for prosperity and growth after Independence in Zambia never materialised for most of the people and the prevalent mood at the moment (1994) is one of despair and fatalism, of anger and frustration.

How could this happen?

Many factors, both external and internal, are at play: South Africa’s former destabilisation policy in the region, declining world markets for raw materials, the rigidity of the one-party state with its centralised administration and intertwining of party and administration, mismanagement in government, civil service and parastatals, corruption, a high population growth, etc. Notwithstanding much development support Southern Africa did not benefit a great deal from all these efforts and instead built up a very high debt burden which left certain countries, such as Zambia, bankrupt in the early nineties. To redress the situation, World Bank and IMF came with Structural Adjustment Programmes to restructure the economy of those countries in order to give them a more healthy basis for recovery. Although there was indeed a need to reorganise the Zambian economy, structural adjustment brought also more suffering for the vast majority of people when food subsidies were removed, cash crops were promoted, and civil servants were retrenched.

UNICEF’s call for “adjustment with a human face” (1986) led to the formulation of Social Action Programmes, intended to cushion the effects of the economic measures on the lower and middle classes. UNDP also recognised the need to use other than economic criteria to measure development. In 1990 they introduced the Human Development Index (HDI) which is based on quality of life indicators, such as access to health, education and water and sanitation. Human development as an integral part of the development process became a topic for discussion in the international forum of experts and policy makers. At the 1992 ECOSOC meeting the Under-Secretary for Economic and Social Development stated that there was need to develop new development models: human-centered and participatory, focussing on improving the status of women and protecting vulnerable groups. And the President of the World Bank said at the same meeting that increasing the involvement of women was an important way to make human resource development expenditures more effective. As usual in times of economic hardship, women were seen as shock absorbers who, by leaving their kitchens, could help the economy to stay afloat. What we see here is a
gender blindness which does not acknowledge the work women are already doing, resulting in a workload which does not leave women the time nor the energy for more activities.

This gender blindness can partly be blamed on viricentric ideas about women as housewives and men as breadwinners (however, in many developing countries women are both), and for the other part on the ‘invisibility’ of women in statistics, which is caused by the failure to collect gender-disaggregated data. In 1991 the Human Development Index was improved by including gender disparities in the data. The gender-sensitive development index (GDI) shows us that gender discrimination is a worldwide problem, not confined to the developing countries only, but more strikingly in the developing countries. Wage disparities, for instance, exist in all countries, but developing countries also face great disparities in access of women to health care, nutritional support and education (Human Development Report, 1991). The GDI is measured on the overall achievement of women and men in life expectancy, educational attainment, and adjusted real income. With the GDI women’s access to positions of decision-making was not possible, therefore a new index was introduced in 1995, the Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM). “The GEM examines whether women and men are able to actively participate in economic and political life and take part in decision-making. While the GDI focuses on expansion of capabilities, the GEM is concerned with the use of those capabilities to take advantage of the opportunities of life” (Human Development Report, 1995: 73).

The growing interest in the human factor got another impetus with the political changes in the world after the breakdown of the Iron Curtain. People’s interest in the role they could play in changing their social, political and economic environment was aroused. In Africa people began questioning the one-party system and the nepotism in all sectors of government and administration. In Zambia, for instance, the Movement for Multi-party Democracy (MMD), a working coalition of different interest groups, made a landslide victory in the 1991 elections and ousted Kenneth Kaunda’s United Independence Party (UNIP) which had been in power since Independence in 1964. People were excited and jubilantly took to the streets. That was on 31 October 1991. Now, in 1995, people are again grumbling about the politicians who “never fulfill their promises, who do not bring medicines to the clinics nor water to the compounds, who can not fight the continous outbreak of cholera, and who are even more openly corrupt than the former officials”, as various people said to me. So what went wrong?

For one thing: the transformation from a socialist, centrally governed state to a more democratic system with a capitalist economy based on free enterprise, apparently is not an easy one. The more so because the public administration is working with the same people who were civil servants under the old set-up when party and government were very much intertwined. Another important reason could be that the people and their organisations are not used to the way of thinking and organizing which is essential for a proper functioning civil society and its democratic philosophy.

All these developments make it necessary to critically examine some basic concepts in Development Theory. For me it was an eye-opener to read Graham Hancock’s book Lords of Poverty (1989) in which he critically examines the influence of the IMF, the World Bank and other donor agencies on development efforts. He and other critical thinkers asked questions, such as: What kind of Development are we bringing to the developing countries? Has development assistance created its own relations of dependency? Is it a form of violence, as stated by Joke Schrijvers (1993)? Is the western world using its financial power to force governments and non-governmental organisations in developing countries to take a course which is not based on their own priorities but on donor criteria for funding of a civil society in which they have responsibilities in society? In chapter three I will discuss development in a historical perspective which is based on a reductionist and ‘discover’ objective fact can be controlled. I will be discussing, but on development theory of transforming the world (1993:33) calls: “a focus on respect, differences in approach, people may call this a few questioners. For me it is a basis in acknowledging the growth of people’s self-confidence, empowerment, participation, and issues such as the recognition of interests and the access to a theoretical framework for an equitable theory which is an actor-oriented concept, micro- and macro approaches, between the ‘human’ structuration theory which emphasises the role of NGOs, and concepts of human agency. Between micro and macro approach is common. Four that macro approach and micro approaches are processes of transformation.

In this book two issues on the role of NGOs, in particular five years (1988-1993) of discussion about development. For this I will bring some wider domain of human power and empowerment of individuals, on the around which everything is made up of individuals. Economic and political wheels turn. So what are the solutions. Of course, the “human capital” useful was what counted and the end and the intrinsic value, much attention in development Model, based on partnership which links up with the...
on donor criteria for funding? What kind of development is essential for the creation of a civil society in which people from the grassroots level can and will take up responsibilities in society and participate in decision-making? I agree with Schrijvers (1993) that academics have a role to play in the discussion about development. In chapter three I will discuss both the dominant and the alternative models of development in a historical perspective. It is my view that dominant development philosophy is based on a reductionist perception of social reality in which academics are thought to 'discover' objective facts on which progress can be based and by which social life can be controlled. I will argue that the focus should not be on 'controlling' and 'planning', but on development as a 'process' in which human beings share the responsibility of transforming their physical and social environment by, what Schrijvers (1993:33) calls: "a focus on the values of care, pluriformity, shared responsibility, respect, differences in approach and room for movement from the bottom up". Some people may call this a feminine approach and discard it as an idealist and unrealistic notion. For me it is a basic philosophy of life and a very realistic approach for stimulating the growth of people and society. In such a development model concepts such as empowerment, participation, self-help promotion and sustainability are key words, and issues such as the role and function of non-governmental organisations, gender interests and the access of women to decision-making have a central place. The theoretical framework for an empowerment approach I found in Giddens' structuration theory which is an actor-oriented theory bridging the gap between micro and macro approaches, between the level of the individual(s) and that of structural systems. Giddens' structuration theory is the theoretical framework which best enables me to emphasise the role of NGOs in the empowerment of people and thus of women. His concepts of human agency and structure make it possible to bridge the gap between micro- and macro approaches in development theories. Neither the macro- nor the micro approach is comprehensive or self-sufficient; therefore I will argue in chapter four that macro approaches such as the modernisation- and dependencia models, and micro approaches which focus on the individual are insufficient to explain processes of transformation.

In this book two issues are brought together: gender and development and the role of NGOs, in particular women's organisations, in development. The results of five years (1988-1993) of research are placed within the theoretical context of the discussion about development models and the question of what development should be. For this I will bring some of the insights gained within feminist anthropology into the discussion about development models and the question of what development should be. For too long development thinking focused on macro-economic and technocratic solutions. Of course, there was always an interest in people, but rather in the sense of "human capital" useful for the economy as a means of production. Economic growth was what counted and measured. Human resource development was a means to an end and the intrinsic value of people's growing self-esteem and self-reliance never got much attention in dominant development theories. That's why an Alternative Development Model, based on an actor-oriented approach, was needed in which development is defined in terms of a redefined partnership between North and South; a partnership based on respect for the culture and identity of the local people involved, which links up with their knowledge, know-how and skills, and in which one realises
that their needs and aspirations are the cornerstone of sustainable development. This kind of development would bring people more control over and access to the means of production (such as land and capital), give them more of a say in the direction of development and in matters concerning the environment in which they live.

However, this development approach, in its turn, would also be inadequate if gender issues were neglected. My research focuses on the empowerment of women through the strengthening of their autonomy. This is a theme which often encounters passive or active resistance because it is highly political in a sense that changes in gender relations and gender ideology could be seen as a threat to the very basis of society. Therefore, before I formulate in chapter 3 the central question of my research and discuss the methodology I used, I first will introduce the various concepts of the Gender and Development approach in a historical perspective in chapter 2. In chapters 4 and 5 I will discuss the theoretical framework of development models and feminist anthropology in particular. I will start with a discussion of development models and argue that a Human-centered Development Model in which the empowerment of people is the leading principle is necessary to develop programmes and projects for women. I will also argue that institutional strengthening of NGOs is necessary to make them into effective channels for development in general and women in particular. The bulk of this book is made up of the empirical data and their analysis in chapters 6 to 10. After analysing the data from an empowerment perspective I will conclude in chapter 11 with recommendations for a strategy to make women’s organisations more effective agents of change.

Notes

1. It is interesting to see that when one combines the HDI with the gender-sensitive HDI the position of countries changes. E.g. Japan falls from first to seventeenth position, but Denmark for instance rises from 12 to 4.
2. This was said by African participants at the 1990 Maastricht Conference on Africa.

2. FROM WOMEN’S NEEDS TO GENDER AND DEVELOPMENT

“We need development that will empower her independently and make her a whole person.”

2.1 The concept “Women in Development”

The term Women in Development programmes and projects was introduced and used in development programmes with the aim of giving due attention to the need of special attention to women’s needs in their development programmes. WID, produced and used in development programmes, is an attempt to deal with the Scandinavian concept of WID, which emphasizes women’s needs in their development programmes. WID, as it was defined by the Scandinavian countries, was a word of caution is needed to avoid a planning jargon, has been used to describe the diversity in the situation of women. The complexity of women’s needs and situations emerges that says: Third World women, not literate, untrained. How can they overcome by development programmes in which they have too many children, development programmes which do not provide education and training, incomes which are not enough to support their families, and in which they do not have a voice in their own communities? (e.g., 1988).

2.2 Women, active in their own development

Women’s studies over the world have shown that women are not passive agents in economic, social, and solidarity networks. They hold crops, tend animals, work as labourers; they are members of villages and by the roadsides. Some of them are

The majority of the marginalised and poorer women in the world: