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**Development with or without
women?**

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Development with or without women?

Bonn, 8 March 2010. Fifteen years after the World Conference on Women in Beijing, the statement, there can be no durable development successes without the active participation of women, has become a core component of development policy.

Why is that? Not only because gender equality is a universal human right but also because of the diverse potentials that women, in their roles and functions, have for social development. And here we continue to see ourselves faced, regrettably, with the need to speak of potentials, because many women are prevented by laws, traditions, and the restricted voice they have in decision-making from fully utilising their abilities.

What do these potentials consist in? First of all – as in the case of men – in the education and training they have acquired, and that enables them to seek regular employment in the labour market or to engage in own-account work, in this way contributing to consumption and growth. Empirical studies have furthermore shown that on the whole women tend more than men to spend their own income (or household income over which they have a say) on the needs of their children, that is, for their children's health and education, in this way providing an important indirect contribution to development.

Women are prevented from developing these potentials by barriers in three areas: In many societies women have limited access to education and healthcare. This constitutes a barrier to their participation in labour and other markets. But there are also countries in which women, while able to acquire educational qualifications, including university degrees, are prevented by certain barriers from exercising their freedom of movement, from engaging in gainful employment. Finally, laws (which in Germany were abolished only in the 1960s) or traditions often ensure that women have little or no say on the uses to which their own income or their household income is put. Empirical studies prove that women and the societies they live in are better off without these barriers.

This view – that it is important to promote women, not because they provide an important contribution to development, but because they have a right to self-determination – is sometimes criticised as instrumentalism. In practice, though, far from conflicting, these aims tend to reinforce and strengthen one another. Practical improvements in the situation of women may also entail political effects, and sometime solutions found for entirely different problems may prove relevant for the advancement of women. To cite one example, women smallholders in Malawi have, under the pressure generated by climate change, altered their traditional gender roles, opening up new scopes of action for themselves. They have developed new cropping patterns, making use of changing precipitation patterns to plant a second maize crop. Not stopping at that, they have also developed new sources of income beyond traditional role assignments. Not rarely, this has served to undercut the hegemony that men enjoy when it comes to deciding on the uses to which household money and resources are put. In some village communities in Malawi, men and women have now joined forces in developing and implementing adaptation strategies for small farms.



Be that as it may, since the 1995 World Conference on Women, at the very latest, the aim of strengthening the participatory rights of women has been on the programme. But what practical effects has this programmatic decision had? How can it be harnessed for the planning and implementation of development cooperation and efforts to improve women's living conditions?

Studies indicate that political commitments to gender mainstreaming often evaporate in the process of planning and implementing development measures. In an article they published in 2005, Caroline and Annalise Moser refer to this problem as "policy evaporation," a phenomenon familiar from other cross-cutting policy fields, in particular from environmental policy. Most development organisations pursue a dual approach, seeking to implement both gender mainstreaming (gender equity as an integral dimension of all sector policies and programmes) and specific activities geared to strengthening women's rights. Still, the effectiveness of these measures remains limited.

There are many reasons for this. The central concern is whether the management of the relevant organisations plays an active advocacy role when it comes to gender issues, in this way boosting the latter's legitimacy. Another concern is to build gender expertise on a permanent basis, making use of a permanent staff, and not mainly hiring experts for the purpose. Too often, gender issues continue to be treated separately and not as integral issues that need to be incorporated into an organisation's work.

Appropriately integrating the gender dimension into approaches geared to solving concrete problems is in fact an exacting task. For the concern is to translate a general statement, viz. that politics needs to have a gender perspective in all areas, into concrete statements on the gender dimension of specific problems and their causes and effects. Depending on the country-specific context involved, and never losing sight of the concrete problem in question, it is essential that efforts be constantly renewed to establish links to gender issues. This calls for gender, professional, and country expertise that is in part difficult to acquire and needs to be kept up to date, regularly upgraded. In this sense gender mainstreaming is an ongoing process, not a goal that may, and will, be reached definitively at some point of time.

The World Bank has shown how concrete advances can be achieved. Its Gender Action Plan (GAP) makes resources available, on request, for World Bank staff members interested in closing knowledge gaps or integrating aspects of gender equality into their project work. This has led to an increase in the number of the gender-specific studies, statistics, and impact analyses produced at the Bank. Instead of elapsing as soon as the GAP has run its course, this opportunity to raise, and deal with, gender-related issues should be given permanent status. The European Commission has gained similarly positive experience with its (likewise, and regrettably, non-permanent) "environmental help desk," which has been available to support staff members involved in environmental mainstreaming.

The GAP has been strengthened by the decision taken in 2007 by World Bank President Robert Zoellick to publicly commit the Bank to reaching concrete gender targets. As the world's largest development organisation, the World Bank should continue consistently to pursue this course, even in the face of resistance to it – and not only on the part of Saudi Arabia. This is one reason



why signals also need to be set in bilateral development cooperation. The German Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) is in a good position to set such signals in implementing its Action Plan on Gender 2009-2012.



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