

Gender Inequalities Continue in Rural African Mountain Communities

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Gender Inequalities Continue in Rural African Mountain Communities

African women still experience discrimination

As pointed out at the Beijing +5, Women 2000 United Nations Conference on “Gender Equality, Development and Peace for the 21st Century,” 5 years after adoption of the famous Beijing Platform of Action, women in Africa have still not won their intense battle for emancipation. Dismal conditions of inequality in gender roles and status may never be expressed in global statistics. It is worth asking again: “What real progress are women in Africa making in their lives despite the progress reported at the global level?” Despite the closing of gender gaps in employment, education, and other vital sectors, it appears that division of labor in rural areas continues to be dictated by unchanging discriminatory traditions. The militancy of the women’s movement in Africa seems to have had little effect on the persistent poverty and inequalities faced by women.

Gender analysis is based on the current process of democratization and transformation, as well as on a desire to completely depart from the exclusionist philosophy of apartheid and other racist policies. In South Africa and Africa as a whole, people are saying “no” to cultural and political practices that are contrary to justice, equity, and the well being of all people, regardless of their gender or other differences. But there is a strong need to raise awareness of gender inequalities, as has been recognized by development cooperation in many cases.

Gender analysis in the Soutpansberg Mountains, South Africa

The present summary is excerpted from a gender analysis consultancy report on a community development program in the Northern Province of South Africa. The communities studied reside in the vicinity of the Soutpansberg Mountains. The objectives of the gender analysis were to:

- Increase participants’ awareness of the different ways development projects affect women and men.
- Increase awareness of gender sensitivity in project implementation.
- Build participants’ skills in determining how to intervene in the project cycle to improve effectiveness.

TABLE 1 The gender game.

What men like about women	What women like about men
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Practice what they are taught • Caring • Hard workers • Good at participation • Good listeners • Can represent men • Tolerant 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offer help and advice • Hard workers • On good terms with each other • Do not gossip • Cooperative • Source of security
What men do not like about women	What women do not like about men
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Love of money • Gossip • Short-tempered • Make quick decisions • Do not respect one another • Do not participate in meetings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do not allow their wives to earn income • Do not participate in meetings • Too forceful • Are just like babies but do not care for them • Oppressive and selfish—arrive late • Fond of liquor • Admire better-dressed women but only if they are not their wives

The gender analysis framework

Every development project affects women and men differently in a given location, and women and men will affect the project in different ways. Analysis of how such effects occur requires appreciation of one another across gender boundaries, understanding of gendered activity profiles, awareness of differences in access to and control of resources and opportunities, and understanding of the factors that influence access and control. In this case, participatory learning methods were introduced and communities divided along gender lines for performance of the following exercises.

TABLE 2 Access to, use of, and control over resources.

Access to and use of resources			Control over resources		
Men	Women	Both	Men	Women	Both
Money Livestock	Cooking pots Chicken	Land House Vegetable garden Marketing crops	Land Money Sale of crops Sale of vegetables House Livestock Sale of chicken	Cooking pots	

The “gender game”

The women’s group was asked to write what they like and do not like about men and vice versa (Table 1). The 2 views were displayed on a flip chart and discussed in a plenary session, and consensus on views was eventually sought.

The gender game revealed that women and men like different things in each other. They also perceive each other from different perspectives, so it is erroneous to think that men can adequately present the views of women and vice versa. It also became clear that women tend to be appreciated more for the fact that they offer services than for their competencies and adaptive strategies: taking care of food and health matters, managing with little or no money, nurturing the family, etc. Men are appreciated for creative roles such as providing security and being heads of households. But they are not trusted, even with household responsibilities or child-care, and they are believed to be too self-centered.

The gender game also revealed that it would be wrong to assume that harmony can reign continuously in households and communities. A communal development approach whereby the management of labor and markets is entrusted to the whole group might give rise to conflicts and cause projects to stall; therefore, management of conflicts must be addressed.

Daily activity profiles

Participants were divided into groups according to sex and age.

They were asked to write a schedule of the activities they engaged in from 5 AM to 12 PM. The daily activity profiles showed that women wake up earlier and go to bed much later. They are involved in a multiplicity of activities. Women are responsible for reproductive work, which is repetitive and arduous. Although crucial to daily life, these activities are neither remunerated nor considered to have economic value. It is disturbing that women are expected to share project duties equally with men, who hardly contribute to reproductive activities. As vehicles of change, development projects can therefore help promote women’s interests and make sure that they get more leisure time, just as men do.

Access to, use of and control over resources

Another purpose of these exercises was to analyze gender-based access to resources and decision-making about their use. The exercises tended to arouse much discussion. Consensus about categorization of resources is shown in Table 2.

Women and men seem to have equal access to and use of most resources. Women, however, have access to chicken and cooking implements, whereas men have access to and use of high-prestige resources such as money and livestock. Gender balance exists only with regard to the use of resources.

The exercise also revealed that access to and use of resources does not translate into decision-making

and ultimate control over the benefits. Control over resources can also mean imposing one’s views on those working to ensure these benefits. This is an important point to note, especially as the goal of the projects is to empower the beneficiaries to control resources. Assessing the probable interaction between women and men and the flow of benefits from resources is fundamental in analyzing how projects will affect, and be affected by, women and men in the project area.

The exercise was useful in assessing the power relations among households in the project communities. The information obtained can be used to assess the probable interaction of women and men and the way the project is likely to affect them. The participants agreed that even when there are no constraints on resource use by women (eg, widows and female household heads), they are not always able to realize the benefits of their labor and access to resources. Cultural traditions give men power over women even when they are far from their homes.

Concluding observations

It was observed in all 6 projects that women and men share equally in many activities performed on the farms, such as land clearing and plowing (Figure 1). But when it comes to activities such as planting, weeding, harvesting, drying, processing, storing, and marketing, women’s labor dominates. On the whole, women tend to do the more



FIGURE 1 Women engage in arduous manual labor despite heavy household work, in response to donor and government expectations that communities will provide labor instead of helping to finance a development project. (Photo by Esther Njiro)

repetitive tasks and those that are performed manually without the help of labor-saving technology.

A low level of participation in on-farm activities by young boys and girls was also observed. It appears that parents do not encourage their children to join them in productive activities, even in the projects. Young people spend their time standing around shops rather than engaging in productive activities. This raises concerns about the sustainability of projects, especially as most of the beneficiaries are well over 50 years old.

Men and boys are engaged in livestock activities. But these activi-

ties are not as labor-intensive as reproductive work, such as child-care or fetching water and firewood. Livestock rearing involves letting the animals loose in the field and making sure they are back in the kraal in the evening.

Women and girls are the sole performers of most reproductive activities. Although men construct houses, this is an activity performed once in a lifetime unless there is an unusual problem, whereas reproductive activities are performed regularly, and there is no technology to alleviate these labor-intensive tasks.

Community work is shared equally by women and men, but

women tend to perform activities that are repetitive and without prestige. Men are usually the chief guests for whom chairs are carried, and they are treated as very important people. Women cook, fetch water, serve guests, wash dishes and pots, and make sure everyone is comfortable during the ceremonies. But men are known to fetch firewood when there is a ceremony, and in some places they said that they cooked meat.

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