ABSTRACT

Women play a major role in civil society and economic growth in rural areas of developing countries. However the role that women play and their position in meeting the challenges of Rural Development Programmes are quite dominant and prominent. Despite this, women have been left out of the formal structures for rural development programmes. The Millennium Declaration endorsed by the world’s governments in September 2000 recognized the importance of gender equality and mainstreaming to be the most effective methodology and tool to meet the needs of the goals and produce a successful end result. Unless the gender issues in development programmes are addressed, rural development cannot be achieved. Hence this paper examines the constraints facing by women’s complete integration into the rural development programmes and the mechanism to mitigate the situation.

The important reasons to emphasize gender mainstream in the rural development programmes are effective policy and legislation, effective governance, visible presence of gender equality in the mainstream of society and diversity among women and men. If a problem is tackled merely at the technical level when it also has important underlying social and political dimensions, then the intervention strategy is likely to be ineffective. However, such issues can be addressed through making policies for equal access to and control over resources, increasing skills and knowledge, increasing participation in market oriented agriculture production, strengthening women’s decision making power, increasing accessibility of technology, improving wellbeing and easing workload etc.

Key words: Gender Mainstreaming, Rural Development, Millennium Development Goals

1. Introduction

Development is a continuous process involving, allocating and generating resources (Idachaba, 2000). This is mainly done to satisfy social and economic needs. Development in the rural area is also very important and endowed with abundant human and natural resources. Rural development involves a process by which a set of technical, social, cultural and institutional measures are implemented with and for the inhabitants of rural areas with the aim of improving their socio-economic conditions, to achieve harmony and balance at the state, national and the regional levels (Ekong, 2003).

Women play a major role in civil society and economic growth in rural areas of developing countries. Women’s work is crucial for survival and provides means for poor household to escape the poverty trap; however in many cases, it is obvious that gender integration does not promote and involve women in policy design and decision making in rural development programmes.

Throughout the world, women suffer disadvantages with many social factors imposed on them by religion and culture. These disadvantages and differences vary from country to country and region to region, but nevertheless, it has been proven that women and girls in poor countries, in particular in rural areas, experience a monumental gender disparity across societies. Layers of inequality for women in all
socioeconomic levels result in a lack of opportunities to access education, health, income and political influence. This phenomenon is found in most Developing Countries. Throughout the world, programmes for poverty eradication and rural development are complicated by the different social and economic position of women, relative to men. Women are typically less literate, less educated and more poverty stricken. They have less access to the factors of production – land, labour and capital. Development policies increasingly aim to take account of these differences with special strategies for women – to reach them in their more remote location, to provide them with the necessary information, to link them with appropriate information systems, and so on. More politically, development policies may be concerned with women’s mobilization and collective action at the grassroots, to enable women to take action to recognize and address their own special problems and needs. The Millennium Declaration endorsed by the world’s governments in September 2000 recognized the importance of gender equality and mainstreaming to be the most effective methodology and tool to meet the needs of the goals and produce a successful end result. Several projects and good practices have proven that gender mainstreaming will have an enormous effect in rural development and poverty reduction, and will be used as a blue print for other similar countries to practice. This paper discusses the importance of gender mainstreaming in rural development programmes so as to achieve the objective of Millennium Development Goals.

Concept of Gender Mainstreaming
Gender mainstreaming is defined by the United Nations as the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action in all areas and at all levels. It is known as a concept of ensuring that policy and decision-making takes account of cultural barriers, challenges, and men’s and women’s different interests and needs. Recent studies and reports have clearly made a point that gender equality and mainstreaming is highly encouraged and recommended to reduce poverty and meet the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Gender mainstreaming is the globally recognized strategy for achieving gender equality. "Mainstreaming a gender perspective is the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in any area and at all levels. It is a strategy for making the concerns and experiences of women as well as of men an integral part of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres, so that women and men benefit equally, and inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal of mainstreaming is to achieve gender equality".

Mainstreaming gender equity has become a strategic objective of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. To achieve FAO’s vision of a world free of hunger and malnutrition, its new strategic framework identifies a series of objectives that define impacts – in countries, regions and globe. Strategic objective K – “Gender equity in access to resources, goods, services and decision-making” – responds to overwhelming evidence that gender inequality exacerbates food insecurity, malnutrition and poverty. Social and economic inequalities between men and women undermine food security and hold back economic growth.

By mainstreaming gender equity into all of rural development programmes, MDGs can be achieved. The essence of equity is not identical treatment – treatment may be equal or different, but should always be considered equivalent in terms of rights, benefits, obligations and opportunities. Since male predominance in the family, public policy and institutions – not only in rural areas, but worldwide – has long obscured women’s interests. The United Nations considers gender balance fundamental to the
achievement of equality, development and peace. To accomplish it in agriculture and rural development, action is needed by rural communities, governments and international development agencies. At the local level, for example, gender balance means men and women are actively involved in decision-making bodies, including those managing community facilities and infrastructure. The marriage of gender with global initiatives such as the MDGs permanently staged gender in public discourses. The frequency with which gender is named in the context of poverty alleviation strategies is striking. From the conjectured synergies between gender equity, economic growth and effective poverty alleviation an actual “win-win”-formula was derived (Rodenberg 2004, iv).

Dimensions of Gender Issues

It is particularly in the area of gender that we need to be aware of the technical, social and political dimensions of a problem. If a problem is tackled merely at the technical level when it also has important underlying social and political dimensions, then the intervention strategy is likely to be ineffective. Here the technical dimension refers to the obvious empirical manifestation of a problem, and also how it affects individuals. In terms of gender issues, we might be looking at women’s lack of land (relative to men), their lack of literacy, lack of skills training, lack of access to market, limited access to agricultural information, and so on. If a gender issue is interpreted at this level, a development programme may intervene directly to provide literacy training, or agricultural information, increased access to market, and so on.

But underlying the technical dimension there is likely to be an important social dimension. For instance, women’s lack of access to various factors may be tied in with their more domestic location and duties, and the traditional culture of women staying on the farm; conversely males have more freedom of movement to access schooling, information, markets, and so on. If this is the case, then interventions to address the situation must take into account the social dimensions of the problem, for instance by adapting interventions to women’s current pattern of social gathering and interaction (e.g. church meetings), rather than attempt new social forms (e.g. night school classes) which might severely contradict and upset the existing social conventions and values. Of course it may be necessary to break with tradition, and introduce new social forms, even new institutions. If so, the problem must be properly understood, and interventions developed with and for the community themselves, taking account of the political dimensions of the problem.

The underlying political dimension involves issues of power and control. This is especially so in the area of gender, where all countries – to greater or lesser extents – are patriarchal. There is a longstanding tradition that the man is the ‘head of the household’, and the wider political and administrative structures tend to be a reflection of this patriarchal pattern. This leaves women with little control over land and capital – or even over her own labour! It is therefore to be expected that men will resist any programme intervention that seeks to lesson men’s privileges, and their power and control over women. Of course it may be that addressing important issues in rural development programmes must necessarily address issues of women’s oppression and subordination.

But if so, development agencies must understand the problem area, and how to develop strategies for women’s participation and mobilization in a process for empowerment and liberation. By the same token, if a development agency blunders innocently into this area, whilst not understanding the underlying gender politics, they may never understand the process by which their development programme collapsed and failed.
Importance of Gender Mainstreaming
The most important reasons to emphasize gender mainstreaming are as follows:

**More Effective Policy and Legislation:** Policy-makers will have to pay attention to the broad effects of policies on citizens’ livelihood—and that, as a result, may mean a more human and less economic approach to the management of contemporary societies.

**More Effective Governance:** If gender mainstreaming is used, policymaking will be better informed and show that policies are never gender neutral. Buy-in of men and productive collaborative efforts between women and men utilize a diverse human resources. As the stakeholders are getting involved in the process and implementation of gender mainstreaming, a clear shift will take place from isolation to integrate both genders, in particular involve men in gender equality work.

**Visible presence of gender equality in the mainstream of society:** Based on a successful track record and good practices, mainstreaming will show that gender equality is an important societal issue with implications for the development of society.

**Diversity among women and men:** Equality policies usually target women as a whole—but gender mainstreaming should be able to target the diverse situations of different groups of both women and men (migrant women, young women, old men, etc).

**Gender equality and the Millennium Development Goals**
The third of the United Nations MDGs is to “Promote gender equality and empower women”. It sets a target of eliminating gender disparity in all levels of education by 2015. Gender equality can also help the international community to achieve other important MDGs:

**MDG1: Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger:** Increasing rural women’s agricultural production and participation in the labour force helps to reduce poverty and stimulate economic growth.

**MDG4: Reduce child mortality:** Rural women’s lack of access to education and assets is directly linked to high rates of child and infant mortality.

**MDG5: Improve maternal health:** The vast majority of maternal deaths – estimated at half a million a year – could be prevented through better access for women to reproductive health services.

**MDG6: Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases:** Gender inequality is recognized as one of the driving forces behind the spread of HIV infection and AIDS.

**MDG7: Ensure environmental sustainability:** As farmers and household providers, rural women manage natural resources daily. Their participation in programmes for the sustainable management of land, water and biodiversity is essential.

**Mainstreaming Gender in Rural Development programmes – Way Forward**
Gender mainstreaming encompasses all aspects of planning, implementing and monitoring any social, political or economic action. In the implementation phase, changes occur in both “internal” organizational and “external” operational procedures. To successfully mainstream gender in rural areas through different rural development programmes, internal local government and the community should make a firm commitment to embrace the goals and have a thorough understanding of the values of mainstreaming that contributes to economic and rural development.

**Dimensions of Gender Mainstreaming:** The proposed dimensions to promote gender mainstreaming are: political will, technical capacity, accountability and organizational culture. The outcome of these efforts will significantly beneficial to the community and the organizations themselves. The economic and community benefits included; greater agriculture production, improved sanitation, better health, and nutrition and increased primary school enrolment rates, particularly for girls.
i. **Increasing women’s access to and control over resources**: There should be improvement in women’s access to basic economic resources such as land (as owners), labour saving machines, food processing machines, credit and agricultural innovations.
   - Equal opportunity of landholding for both men and women
   - Equal inheritance of land to both boy and girls
   - Freedom to enjoy the resources and assets around them
   - Offering decision making power to the women in utilizing the resources

ii. **Increasing women’s access to skills and knowledge**: Activities to increase women’s opportunities to strengthen their skills and knowledge base include:
   - Supporting development including those from poorer households and women, to gain access to relevant information sources to make their lives and farming activities easier.
   - Adopting different training approaches to increase women’s participation (e.g. training husband and wife, providing separate training for women, ensuring the timing/venues are convenient for women).
   - Developing women’s skills in areas that are not traditionally considered to be in the women’s domain.

iii. **Increasing women’s participation in market-oriented agricultural production**: Activities to increase women’s participation in agricultural production need to address issues of market access such as:
   - Supporting the development of crop and livestock enterprises that are in the women’s domain, and taking steps to ensure they retain control of the benefits during this process of commercialization.
   - Promoting household planning for building trust and encouraging skills among household members, and promoting the fair use of earnings.
   - Setting up women’s self-help groups for processing and marketing, including sharing market information in order to gain economies of scale and stronger market bargaining power.

iv. **Strengthening women’s decision-making role**: Activities to strengthen women’s role in decision-making in the household, local associations include:
   - Training women in group formation, leadership skills, confidence building and negotiating skills.
   - Designing strategies to provide women with more knowledge and information to enable them to make informed decisions.
   - Conducting gender awareness training at the community level to increase general understanding about the importance of including women in rural development programmes.

v. **Gender Equity in Access to Markets**: Access to markets has a significant impact on women’s access to improved income and family livelihoods. Thus, rural development programmes and projects should give full attention to ensure that market prices and other information reach men and women equally, that the location of market infrastructure and rental of market space are easily accessible and affordable by female producers as well.

vi. **Access to Technology**: This plays an important role in determining gender differentiated improvements in income generated. Thus, proposed interventions should consider providing improved basic tools to improve activities done by hand, and that farming technology options should consider women specific limitations, such as their physical strength, size, and time constraints.
vii. Improving wellbeing and easing workloads: Activities to ease women’s workloads by facilitating access to labour saving technologies not only improves their wellbeing but also gives them more opportunity to participate in productive activities, if they wish:

viii. Operational measures for gender mainstreaming:
- Forging and strengthening the political will to achieve gender equality and equity, at the local, national, regional and global levels;
- Incorporating a gender perspective into the planning processes of all ministries and departments of government, particularly those concerned with macroeconomic and development planning, personnel policies and management, and legal affairs;
- Integrating a gender perspective into all phases of sectoral planning cycles, including the analysis development, appraisal, implementation, monitoring and evaluation policies, programmes and projects;
- Using sex-disaggregated data (data that is collected and presented separately on men and women) in statistical analysis to reveal how policies impact differently on women and men;
- Increasing the numbers of women in decision-making positions in government and the private and public sectors;
- Providing tools and training in gender awareness, gender analysis and gender planning to decision-makers, senior managers and other key personnel.
- In addition to the activities described above which address gender inequalities through strengthening project design, opportunities also exist to mainstreaming gender considerations into operational procedures:
  - Setting specific targets in terms of the proportion of women participants in different activities and relevant decision-making bodies.
  - Working with partners with experience of and willingness to work with women: strengthen the gender capacity of government (at all levels), service providers and implementing partners to mainstream gender into their activities.

ix. Participation in development planning and decision-making: Women’s involvement in development planning and decision-making is essential to sustainable human and economic development. Community based groups such as water user’s associations and village development committees, which have an important role in deciding on available economic and production opportunities, needs adequate attention to women specific constraints which in turn reduce the impact of sustainable poverty reduction measures.

x. Rural Infrastructure: In rural areas women fetching water consumes a lot of their time and thus they are unable to undertake other social or economic activities. Due to the time consumed in this activity women will assign children, boys and girls to fetch water sometimes and this would be at the expense of the children’s schooling. Water borne diseases are also known to occur in this activity due to the inadequate management of the water source as well as the trekking of the distance through forests and other unpaved areas.

xi. Connecting scales: As rural development aims at increasing the proportion of people in the labour market, success is often measured in terms of the number of participants.

xii. Time concern: Women do not get liberated from other time and energy consuming responsibilities which are assigned to them according to traditional gender roles and even if their bargaining power might raise, it is not there where those decisions are taken which determine the life of rural people by, among other things, draw the line between remunerated and
unremunerated work (income possibilities, infrastructural investments, social protection, service delivery systems and subsidies). “The bulk of unpaid care work across all economies and cultures is performed by women” (Budlender 2008). The time women have at their disposal, and the options they have to use this limited resource for income generating activities have to be integrated systematically into the Rural Development Programmes and their market logic.

xiii. **Enhancing women’s organizing**: If women control assets and organize themselves in cooperatives the risk to lose the assets is minimal. If women struggle on their own they are more likely to lose their privilege. Again it’s a combination of local governance, its gender responsiveness and the disposition of national politics to defend gendered local interests. These interests need to be framed in the sense of communal development and not of single household or entrepreneurial quest for maximum output. Subsidizing communal budgets for economic development would be one way to do this. In a more long-term perspective an increase of expenditures on social infrastructure should be promoted inducing job creation at local level combined with social safety nets and gender responsive protection schemes (Seguino 2009).

xiv. **Reconciling program log frames with complex social realities**: The management tools for the promotion of gender equality have to account for the social complexity including the risks linked to the rural development programmes. Logical frameworks have become one of the important tools to guarantee accountability. Reflecting and reviewing conventional procedures from different angles is only possible though, if there are enough resources, expertise and commitment to mainstream gender equality into programs. It is crucial to integrate the know-how and experiences, the logics and discourses of local NGOs, and other civil society organisations to reflect and review and give critical feedbacks according to their roles and objectives. Commitment however remains crucial. Changes, even radical ones regarding methodologies, beneficiaries, space of intervention or partners might need to be reconsidered.

If we focus on the articulation of (unpaid) care work and income generating work, the gender analysis will provide different sets of information, about how household structures are reinforced or changed by the allocation of the additional cash women provide for the household. It sheds light on intra-household relation which would remain in the dark if participation of women in the market economy remains the only criterion. Focusing on intra-household and community relations and on the way they are re-written by including women in market oriented activities shows whether the overall burden of women’s responsibilities is growing.

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**Gender Mainstreaming in Programme Planning**

Any rural development programme must, as part of its basic process of planning and implementation, leave space for the participation and mobilization of women. This means leaving space for the process of empowerment, by which women can work within the programme for the recognition and analysis of gender issues, and their collective action to address these issues. Gender issues should not be treated as a separate issue, nor should ‘gender orientation’ be treated merely as a style of implementation. On the contrary, the identification of gender issues, and the formulation of objectives and strategies to address these issues, must be central and intrinsic within the development plan. A development plan should typically present itself as a rational argument, pursued by logical connections along sequence: (i) Elements of a Strategic Development Plan; (ii) Situation Analysis; (iii) Policy Imperatives; (iv) Problem Identification; (v) Formulation of Goals; (vi) Intervention Strategies; (vii) Implementation Strategies; (viii) Objectives; (ix) Implementation Sequence; (x) Management System; (xi) System of Monitoring and
Evaluation. In this sequence, it is common for a programme’s interest in gender issues to be either entirely missing from the above sequence, or otherwise to fade away as the programme document proceeds from Situation Analysis in the direction of Implementation and Management. Therefore, it is important that gender orientation should be found at the beginning of a development plan, and that this interest should be properly and rationally maintained throughout the planning and implementing sequence, without fading away or suddenly disappearing.

We shall now look at the first seven elements of the above logical sequence of a development plan, with a view to explicating the planning sequence, and at the same time seeing how gender issues go missing, or otherwise fade away.

Situation Analysis refers to the initial review of the situation in the area that is of interest to the plan, particularly to mention the various problem situations that might need to be addressed through the programme. In any rural development programme, we should expect the analysis to include the various gender issues that stand in the way of equitable development, and which perhaps equally impede the development process. In practice, gender issues may disappear from a programme plan at this stage, if the situational analysis provides little or no information on gender gaps and the discriminatory practices which underlie them. It is a good general rule that gender gaps should be revealed by the routine gender disaggregation of all socio-economic data.

Policy Imperatives refer to those aspects of the policy environment that are relevant when deciding what to do about the given situation. In the area of gender, a development programme is subject to the principles and goals accepted by all parties in international agreements and conventions (notably the 1995 UN Beijing Declaration and Platform, and the 1979 UN Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women). National governments and development agencies also have their own gender policies, which to some extent reflect and contextualise the international agreements to which they are party. But in practice it is common for a development plan to outline general development principles, but to overlook gender principles.

Problem Identification - In terms of formal planning logic, no situation can be said to present a problem unless there are policy principles that dictate which aspects of the situation are unacceptable. It is these unacceptable aspects that present the problems on which action must be taken. Despite this formal logic, many problems are identified as ‘obvious’, and may indeed be so. But the ‘obvious’ aspects of problem identification tend to be notably missing in the area of gender. Whereas many ordinary problems are ‘obvious’ without recourse to looking at the policy, gender issues tend to get overlooked, along with the gender policy itself. Gender issues may be overlooked as being ‘political’ in plans that take a technical or purely economic perspective. They may be overlooked where the vocabulary is gender neutral, in terms of ‘people’, ‘farmers’, ‘target group’, ‘beneficiaries’, and so on, which provide an easy formula for gender blind treatment of development issues. For the identification of (glaring!) gender issues, it may be necessary to wave the gender policy in the planners’ faces before the existence of gender issues can be admitted.

Formulation of Goals should follow naturally from problem identification, where a goal may be summarized as an expressed intention to address a problem, perhaps with a statement of intended quantified outcomes, to be achieved in a specified time. In terms of gender issues, the goal should simply state the intention to address and eliminate the gender issue, for instance by ending a discriminatory practice, and by closing a gender gap.

Intervention Strategies - The logic in moving from goal to intervention strategy is that the chosen intervention, in order to be effective, must tackle one or more of the underlying causes of the given
problem. But with poor planning, the intervention is merely considered to be a ‘good thing to do’, without any established causal connection with the original problem. In the case of gender issues, we should expect that an intervention strategy must be effective by addressing the underlying causes of the gender issue, and feasible in terms of previous experience, and in terms of anticipating, countering or bypassing patriarchal opposition. Strategies of information, communication and mobilization can never be good strategies ‘in themselves’, but need to be justified in terms of achieving goals, and addressing underlying causes (e.g. Is lack of information actually a root cause of the problem being addressed? Or is it merely a symptom of a larger underlying problem?). For gender orientation, strategies need to be justified by their contribution to the process of women’s empowerment, as a means towards addressing gender issues.

Implementation Strategies - It is often useful to distinguish between the higher level intervention strategy and the lower level implementation strategies. There may be many different alternative strategies for the implementation of any given intervention strategy. For example, the goal of access to agricultural information may be achieved by the intervention strategy of increasing women’s literacy. Increasing women’s literacy may be achieved by various alternative implementation strategies, such as increased formal schooling for girls, adult literacy classes, each one teach one, etc. For gender orientation, the appropriateness of an information strategy needs to be assessed partly by its effectiveness in distributing information, and partly by its effectiveness in promoting the larger process of women’s empowerment.

Objectives are the expression of the more specific and more detailed intention of implementation purpose, especially in terms of activities and intended outcomes. Very often an implementation strategy is not properly identified or even justified, but may be deduced by its being implicit within a list of objectives. In the area of gender, programme objectives typically do not show any intention to address gender issues. The plain truth of the matter is that the gender orientation of programmes is about recognizing and addressing gender issues. The intention to do so must be clearly made explicit in the goals and objectives, and in the description of the implementation process. Even then, it is very difficult to push implementing agencies to actually do the job, because they prefer an easy life, and do not wish to get implicated in upsetting the existing patriarchal social order.

A gender oriented objective may be an outcome objective, concerned with closing gender gaps, or ending a discriminatory practice. Or a gender-oriented objective may be a process objective, concerned with the activities and social process by which the outcome is to be achieved. The process of women’s empowerment is just as important as the resulting outcomes in closing gender gaps. Even if women’s collective action fails to make much progress in closing a gender gap, women of the community have learnt much from the process of collective mobilization around gender issues. This may be even more important than the material results, because even if they failed this time, they may have learned enough to succeed next time! Empowerment is a cumulative process!

CONCLUSION

Women’s productive role in rural development continues to be underestimated in many countries as unpaid workers are frequently excluded from national statistics and/or farm women are considered housewives in statistics. Such underestimation must be addressed in order to clearly demonstrate the importance of women in rural development programmes. Creating feedback channels between all parties in the development equation would bring about the necessary equalization to the full participation women in the economic benefits. Also through making policies for equal access to and
control over resources, increasing skills and knowledge, increasing participation in market oriented agriculture production, strengthening women’s decision making power, increasing accessibility of technology, improving wellbeing and easing workload etc. Empowering women for participation in decision making and leadership represents the most appropriate and effective way forward to achieve Millennium Development Goals.

REFERENCES