



**United Nations
University**

Workshop on Gender and Poverty Alleviation

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REPORT

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I. Introduction

Gender equality is increasingly seen as an indicator of, and a precondition for, sustainable development in all areas, notably poverty reduction. Many international and financial organizations as well as governments of industrialized and developing countries support this viewpoint. Despite the growing recognition of the relevance of gender for the persistence of poverty and the effectiveness of poverty alleviation strategies, anti-poverty policy still for the most part does not address gender equality as an integral part of poverty alleviation measures. As indicated by the substantial literature on the links between gender and poverty, the reason for this is not a lack of academic and other kinds of research insight into the problem but insufficient translation of research findings on these links into policy.

A Workshop on Gender and Poverty Alleviation was convened in Tokyo on 28 and 29 November 2002 by the United Nations University. It was divided into three sessions with thematic presentations focusing on (1) current policies for the reduction of poverty, (2) policy implementation and monitoring mechanisms, and (3) the nexus between research and policy-making. This report covers each of the workshop sessions in a separate section. The presentations provided an introduction to the discussions and allowed for in-depth exploration of the interconnections of these issues on various levels. The workshop had a special regional focus on the Asian and Pacific region and brought together 15 persons from various national and international institutions and organizations as well as academia (see annex.)

An important objective of the workshop was to provide an input into the continuing debate on the positive catalytic effect of linking gender equality and sustainable poverty reduction, as will become clear from this report.

II. Current strategies and policies for the reduction of poverty

History teaches that for development strategies, including poverty reduction measures, to be successful, they must integrate a sound and stable policy framework. This section examines examples of the ways in which gender issues have been addressed in existing policies and strategies aimed at eradicating poverty in the Asian and Pacific region. By pointing out the strengths and limitations of these policies, it aims to demonstrate how existing obstacles can be removed, resolved and prevented.

It is now more or less generally accepted that poverty affects men and women differently, and that men and women can play equally important, if sometimes substantially different, roles in alleviating poverty. Gender equality and the empowerment of women are thus increasingly recognized as essential conditions for the

reduction of poverty. This is reflected in the ways in which governments, civil society and international organizations have created gender machineries and policies. On the international level, examples are the gender integration policy of the Asia-Pacific Economic Organization (APEC), policies in gender equality adopted by the International Labor Organization (ILO) and the gender and development policy framework of the Asian Development Bank (ADB).

The growing awareness of the importance of bringing gender issues to bear upon initiatives to reduce poverty is also visible from various methods designed for the incorporation of gender issues in poverty alleviation strategies and mechanisms. Examples of such strategies and mechanisms are the World Bank's Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers, various national development frameworks, examinations of resource allocation, in particular gender responsive budgets, and national and international legal and judicial frameworks. Analysis and action on gender issues, the participation of women as well as men in governance processes at all levels, their engagement in civil society, and the recognition by institutions of women's rights and needs are understood as core elements of poverty reduction plans.

In spite of the general understanding and acceptance of the idea that gender analysis should be integral to all instruments and processes for poverty reduction, progress is often slow and remains inconsistent. Macroeconomic policies, for instance, rarely take the specific situations of women into account even in recent years, resulting in detrimental effects on the lives of women. This true in particular in the Asian and the Pacific region, where the majority of the region's poor are women. Neo-liberal macro-economic policies, including trade liberalization and the commercialization of welfare and social services, often do not take gender perspectives into account, systematically underestimating the important nexus between women's poverty at the micro-level and national anti-poverty policies at the macro-economic level. In addition, the commercialization of welfare and social services may increase competition among women working in these sectors, resulting in lower wages and deteriorating working conditions. Macro-economic policies, therefore, need to not only take account of their possible effects on women's access to welfare and social services, but should also include measures to offset any negative impact on women's roles as welfare and social service providers.

The known advantages to be gained by designing gender-specific approaches in non-economic policy areas, such as environmental and natural resource management, food security, rural development, and health have also not yet been sufficiently reflected

in policy making. For each of these policy areas, it is necessary to delineate the different roles of men and women and to link macro- with micro level policies.

With regard to environmental concerns and natural resources, for instance, governments and development agencies increasingly warn not to neglect the role of women. It is widely known that women play an essential role in the management of the environment and natural resources, including soil, water, forests and energy, especially in developing countries. Past experiences demonstrate that the exclusion of women from environmental projects, due to neglect of the relevance of gender or a belief in the “gender neutrality” of environmental issues, leads to detrimental consequences for women and, ultimately, to project failures. The primary requirement for policy makers in this area is therefore to understand that men’s and women’s interests and incentives for environmental conservation and techniques, as well as natural resource management, are different. This is often due to the fact that women have no or little property rights to environmental and natural resources. New environmental policies should therefore consider whether natural resource users in a particular area are men or women, and how the thus identified target group can best be reached by legal instruments and the delivery of services. Changes in environmental policies, project design and implementation should produce real benefits for women and men alike. The same is true for other policy areas, including agriculture; food security and rural development; land access, use and rights; health; etc. In each of these areas, special consideration should also be given to the needs of female heads of households.

The workshop recognized that efforts must continue to be made to raise the awareness of policymakers about these issues and to develop a solid knowledge base on the links between gender and poverty. All policy areas directly or indirectly have an effect on the lives of women and men. When gender is explicitly considered in policy analysis, these effects can be revealed, and previously overlooked causal relationships can come to light. Above all, it should be understood that gender analysis is not just an add-on, to be considered after costs and benefits have been assessed along other criteria, but should be an integral part of any policy analysis.

III. Policy implementation and monitoring mechanisms

While gender has become an increasingly important component of poverty alleviation policies in recent years, an evaluation of the current state of implementation of these policies reveals that there is a discrepancy between gender-sensitivity on the policy level and the implementation level. Even though many policies and programmes take

account of gender differences, they are watered down in the process of implementation. Policies are therefore not always implemented effectively, or not implemented at all.

The inadequate translation of gendered policies into concrete project design and implementation is often due to the fact that gender machineries are isolated from policy implementation structures, both in national governments and within bilateral and multilateral development assistance frameworks. This results in a lack of commitment

A concrete example illustrating the importance of sufficient incentives and institutional arrangements for programme personnel to translate gender targets into projects is the Poverty Alleviation through Technology Dissemination (PATD) programme, launched in 1996 in Yunnan Province in the People's Republic of China. When trying to integrate a gender perspective into this programme, the programme designers faced difficulties: Their request to take account of the needs of women and men separately, instead of looking at the household as one entity, was criticized by government officials and programme managers who argued that the success of the programme was to be assessed in terms of its benefits on the family-level, and that it was irrelevant whether these benefits were geared to, or experienced by, men or women. Based on these experiences at the programme level, the PATD programme now focuses on institutional arrangements that need to be in place to aid programme and project managers to successfully apply a gender-sensitive approach to poverty alleviation projects. These include the creation of reliable policies with clearly defined poverty alleviation targets, more robust indicators of poverty alleviation performance, and monitoring and surveillance institutions and organizations for gender mainstreaming in poverty alleviation programmes.

on part of these implementing agencies to actually put policies into practice, as opposed to the mere verbal inclusion of gender perspectives in policy documents. Local implementing agencies may not yet include enough gender-trained individuals, both women and men, among their staff or as participants in their meetings. There are also insufficient incentives for programme and project personnel to translate gender targets into concrete projects or project modules and to include the attainment of those targets among the criteria to evaluate project performance.

To increase commitment to gendered anti-poverty policy implementation, advocacy efforts continue to be necessary to sensitize all persons involved in development and development cooperation to the need to follow a gendered approach. New allies and partners, including men, should be identified on the national level and within the development cooperation structures.

Knowledge and experience with regard to gendered policies often also rest with a few individuals, with insufficient measures in place to retain relevant knowledge and

experience when these individuals leave the organization or move to a different position. To facilitate gendered policy implementation, it is therefore important to create mechanisms for knowledge sharing and management within national machineries as well as bilateral and multilateral development cooperation organizations. It is necessary that academia and policy practitioners jointly develop training modules on gendered anti-poverty policy, which should regularly be used to familiarize policy makers, programme managers, project personnel, and project and programme evaluators with issues of gendered policy-making and implementation.

Gendered anti-poverty measures will only achieve their intended outcomes in a sustainable way if they respond to actual needs as perceived by their immediate target groups. It is therefore necessary to achieve a high level of national and local ownership of gendered anti-poverty measures by facilitating ownership through a combination of top-down and bottom-up approaches, and efforts to minimize the gap between the two. It is necessary to identify partners both on the national and on the local level in the target country who have legitimacy and sufficient capacity to actively collaborate in project design and implementation. This will enhance the creation of active and strategic partnerships to uphold the rights of men and women to participation, information, and accountability, including civil society and especially women's networks at grassroots, local, national and global levels.

With regard to top-down approaches, i.e. policy development and implementation in cooperation with existing national administrative structures, cooperation agencies should place more emphasis on assisting the task of policy coordination; develop supportive measures for knowledge retention; and advocate for a strengthened role for women's groups in negotiating processes at different levels, including policy formation and implementation. Sufficient resources should also be made available for gendered anti-poverty policies and there should be a guarantee that these are not diverted to other purposes.

Bottom-up approaches, i.e. the introduction of target group preferences, experiences and knowledge into project design and review, include the involvement of the target group of a specific policy into the project design, implementation and evaluation phases. It also relates to the contextualization of each project within local circumstances, recognizing diversity among cultures and social groups, and respecting local perspectives and locally developed strategies.

As is the case with any development project, the aim of every gendered anti-poverty policy should be the development of endogenous capacity to sustain its effects. Cooperation agencies can facilitate this process by developing issue-based

implementation toolkits that focus on the situation in the field rather than on cooperation agencies' accountability needs. They should also set firm targets for the achievement of gender-related programme and project goals and persistently follow these up in monitoring and evaluation processes.

Many of the regular programme and project reviews and evaluations undertaken by technical cooperation agencies include an assessment of the implementation of gender-sensitive anti-poverty policy. A comparative review of this documentation would provide valuable insights into further measures that could enhance the policy implementation process. It is therefore recommended to conduct comparative, country-specific analyses of programme and project evaluations already available at the various technical cooperation agencies, and that the results of these analyses be distributed widely among the development community.

From the above findings, the workshop called for increased capacities to bridge the gap between gender awareness at the policy-making level and at the implementation level. It drew attention to the importance of top-down processes to include the perspectives of their target groups, and bottom-up processes that help to identify those who already have relevant knowledge or skills or the capacity to develop them. Attention was also drawn to the positive impact of continuous learning and training processes. The dialogue process on the grassroots level should be researched and enhanced, and country-specific and comparative research should be promoted.

IV. The nexus between academic research and policy

As mentioned earlier, the insufficient attention to the critical role of gender equality in poverty alleviation measures and policies is not due to a lack of academic insight into the relevance of gender for successful anti-poverty measures, but to an inadequate translation of research findings on the linkages between poverty and gender into policy. This section aims to point out effective mechanisms to make research more directly policy-oriented, and to make policy-makers more receptive to academic research results.

The workshop recognized the importance of an on-going informed and constructive dialogue among all stakeholders to prevent problems caused by differences in terminology and communication failures between them. The institutionalization of such a dialogue is essential to create effective links between NGOs, social movements, research organizations, academics and government officials. Past experiences have demonstrated that these links are beneficial for the construction of anti-poverty alliances, guided by a common set of values and inspired by the same goal of strengthened capacity in gender analysis for poverty alleviation on the national and the local levels.

Increased national capacities are needed, in particular on the part of national gender equality machineries within central government structures, for the promotion of such alliances. There is also an urgent need for enhanced accountability and participation at the local level. This need can be met by giving greater authority to local governments through a decentralization of anti-poverty policy formation, and through a more decentralized development cooperation.

In order to increase the policy-relevance of academic research, a strong willingness and determination is needed among academics and researchers to broaden their circles. Instead of working solely with other academics and researchers, and formulating purely conceptual poverty reduction models and frameworks, researchers should place more emphasis on practical experience and make full use of participatory action research and case studies. Research is needed that identifies policy gaps, trends, emerging issues, as well as local strategies that have proven effective, and provides concrete recommendations and alternative solutions to policies and programmes affecting women. Interdisciplinary teams and research forums should also be established where economists, sociologists, anthropologists, lawyers, and experts from other disciplines can discuss ways to effectively incorporate gender perspectives into poverty reduction initiatives.

Policy-making should also become more receptive to academic research: The integration of latest gender-related research results into all relevant government legislation, policies and initiatives is crucial to ensure that poverty alleviation policies are at their most effective. In order to enhance regular communication between academia and policy-making, governments on all levels should work in partnership with research organizations to address women's equality issues. However, to broaden the integration of research findings into policy development processes, sufficient funding of policy research is necessary, including support to women's and other civil society organizations at community, regional and national levels that are engaged in action-oriented research on the gender and poverty nexus.

The workshop further pointed out that to facilitate an effective and speedy collaboration between research, policy-making and policy implementation, more reliable statistical data, and better data analysis, are needed that address both quantitative and qualitative dimensions of gender and poverty. Areas for which there is currently a particularly pronounced shortage of gender des-aggregated data relate, among others, to definitions of work, in particular women's work and including home-based and shadow work; patterns of consumption for men and women; measures of standards of living; indicators regarding women's capacities to participate in concrete poverty alleviation projects.

When collecting data, women and child-headed families should be treated as separate categories. Furthermore, since the collection of reliable data is a learning process, guidelines should be developed to support this process.

V. Annex: participants and affiliations

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