

### **The economic effect of development projects on women**

Structural adjustment has made development project a more negative experience for women in third world countries. In the global economy, work is typically understood as something that has value and can be traded on the market for profit. Because this work usually takes place outside of the home, it is largely done by men, while women engage in economically invisible work inside the home. This distinction between private and public work marginalizes the work that women do, making it seem unimportant because it is not economical interaction. The structural changes enforced upon developing nations typically first change the economic structure to a free market system, which fundamentally changes the definition of economically valuable work. This economic shift has necessary social implications, which, coupled with economic changes, denigrates work done by women, ultimately devaluing them both economically and socially. This push towards laissez-faire economics impacts women in the following ways: Women experience a higher rate of unemployment than men, their working conditions deteriorate, educational progress among girls slows, women's unpaid work escalates, and because of all of this, women become poorer. Women are forced to work much harder because, due to this free market form of government, many public services are stopped. Education, medical care, and food supplies are all examples of things considered to need too much government involvement and are therefore decreased when a free market system is

imposed. Ultimately, the introduction of a free market economy into third world countries adversely affects the female populations by denigrating traditional work done by women in the home, because the value of this work is not immediately evident from an economic standpoint.

This economic shift that occurs when structural adjustment is imposed changes the definition of work for many developing societies. For something to be considered work in the global economy, it must be “part of the market of paid exchanges for goods or services.”<sup>1</sup> Many subsistence communities were matriarchal societies before Western developers started imposing adjustment plans upon them. Because families relied on resources from their own land, the women, who usually farmed, cooked, cleaned, and ran the household, were considered very necessary for the survival of the family. With the introduction of a free market economy, where the goods produced on one’s land must be turned over and sold by a higher power, this reliance on women changes. Western powers that entered these developing nations assumed that they should be governed in a patriarchal manner and so men were hired into jobs that women had usually done before. “Development agencies are still largely dominated by white, middle-class men who base their policies on assumptions about households, families and gender relations drawn from Western experience.”<sup>2</sup> After these assumptions were imparted on developing nations, women were expected to stay at home and engage in homemaking, work that isn’t recognized in the global economy. All of a sudden, “definitions of male and female were polarized around the division between work and home, and the construction of women as housewives placed women’s work in the private sphere, as opposed to the public work of the

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<sup>1</sup> Stearns, Jill. *Gender and International Relations*. New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1998, p.183

<sup>2</sup> Stearns, p. 89

market.”<sup>3</sup> This privatization of women’s work further diminished its importance. In this new free market society, women’s work becomes devalued because it can’t be traded on the market and therefore has no economic significance.

The denigration of women’s work changes their economic position significantly. Structural adjustment makes development projects more detrimental to women’s lives. This conscious change in the fundamental nature of economic relationships within a society affects a woman’s ability to care for her family. She is no longer the head of the household, her work no longer matters, and her husband usually is not paid enough to support the family. Women often must take on a paying job so their families can survive. This causes her burden to be doubled; she must take care of her domestic duties and work a paying job at the same time. In Maragoli, East Africa, women must receive permission from their husbands to work in wage labor positions. They also must commit to the idea of working twice as hard as their husbands. “First a husband must allow his wife to leave the yard on a daily basis...Even then, part of the work remains for the woman wage earner, engaging her in a ‘double-day.’ It is the wife’s responsibility to obtain and cook the meals for the family, whether she works outside the yard or not.”<sup>4</sup> Because of structural adjustment, not only is women’s work in the home marginalized, they must work much harder to obtain the same quality of life that they experienced before this free market system was imposed and their economic status was greatly diminished.

Many of the social changes that have arisen from structural adjustment have had an even further negative impact on women. “Despite new pressures to earn income, the evidence seems to indicate that women were more likely to be unemployed than men as a result of the crisis and

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<sup>3</sup> Stearns, pp.83-84

<sup>4</sup> Abwunza, Judith. *Woman’s Voices, Woman’s Power: Dialogues of Resistance from East Africa*. Peterborough. Broadview Press, 1997, p.193

various adjustment measures.”<sup>5</sup> The increase in unemployment rates of women in countries that are undergoing structural adjustment support the idea that structural adjustment is a contributor to women becoming poorer. A study in Mexico “found that young rural women were forced to emigrate to work as domestic servants in other countries under ‘extremely vulnerable conditions.’ Young women and wives were pulled off the land to work as day laborers where ‘they have no social benefits or social security, live in sheds, and are easy targets for sexual abuse.’”<sup>6</sup> Working conditions for women deteriorate badly under a system of structural adjustment, causing many to fall ill and become unable to continue to work, which further contributes to women’s decreasing economic status. Women’s unpaid labor also escalates when structural adjustment occurs. “Globalization and adjustment policies often involve cutbacks in social policies and higher prices for basic necessities...To compensate, women often stretch their limited funds; and their domestic responsibilities often climb.”<sup>7</sup> Because of the escalation of women’s unpaid work, many young girls are not able to focus on their schoolwork and are sometimes forced to drop out. “As women’s unpaid work burden becomes heavier, they enlist more help from girls, thus reducing the girls’ time and attention for their homework.”<sup>8</sup> Education, in turn, becomes harder for women to obtain due to structural adjustment. The decrease in school enrollment for girls has been attributed to the increasing unemployment rate of women.<sup>9</sup> Less educated women have fewer employment opportunities, which directly adds to the adverse economic situations of women in these developing nations. All of these situations

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<sup>5</sup> Sparr, Pamela. *Mortgaging Women’s Lives: Feminist Critiques of Structural Adjustment*. New Jersey:Zed Books, 1994, p.112

<sup>6</sup> Sparr, p.113

<sup>7</sup> Sparr, p.114

<sup>8</sup> Sparr, p.115

<sup>9</sup> Sparr, p.115

that women face under structural adjustment contribute to the high rate of economic poverty among them.

Through these economic and social changes, one can see that women in countries undergoing structural adjustment are attacked from every direction. The definition of work among their society changes and their domestic work is devalued, there are forced to take on a double burden by working wage labor jobs and taking full time care of their family, and their opportunities for education, good working conditions, and government aid are eliminated. The push that Westerners give these developing nations towards a patriarchal society leaves women with much of the burden and very little reward.

### **The environmental effect of development projects on women**

Third-world women's lives are greatly affected by environmental deterioration that is caused by most development projects. One can see the connections by examining the way that development projects, such as the Green Revolution, canal construction, droughts caused by overuse of land, and deforestation hurt the environment and how this degradation negatively affects the lives of third-world women. Malthusian logic supports the idea of natural fertility and disregards women's contraceptive knowledge, while third-world feminists believe that in order to reduce population, socio-economic programs need to be implemented. In order to re-imagine a world with environmental justice and reproductive rights for third-world women, the importance of the involvement of women needs to be noticed. Because women are responsible for the survival of their family, they have the most knowledge about how to survive. Women need to be utilized in development programs to guarantee the possibility of environmental justice and their own reproductive rights.

Development projects undoubtedly cause environmental degradation. By examining many social and economic development projects, one can see the harsh distress that the surrounding environment suffers. For example, the Green Revolution was a development project funded by foreign capital and planned by foreign experts to politically stabilize rural areas and prevent areas from outside of China from being influenced by the Red Revolution.<sup>10</sup> This movement was a factor in the severe environmental degradation of the areas it affected. “The Green Revolution destroyed diverse agricultural systems adapted to the diverse ecosystems of the planet...it wiped out thousands of crops and crop varieties, substituting them with monocultures of rice, wheat and maize across the Third World. It replaced internal inputs with capital and chemical intensive inputs, creating debt for farmers and death for ecosystems.”<sup>11</sup> The dredging and excavation necessary for the Esteros Project, a development strategy which involved constructing four thousand kilometers of canals in Colombia, was a contributing source to the destruction of the mangrove forest that is necessary for the survival of many estuarine organisms that rely on that environment during their life time.<sup>12</sup> By upsetting the balance of an ecological system, as done in the case of the Esteros Project, environmental degradation is inevitable. Droughts, which can be caused by human interaction in an environment, cause serious environmental damage, and unfortunately, many procedures that are necessary for some development projects cause droughts to occur. “Overcultivation of cropland, overgrazed rangelands, deforestation and irrigation all change fertile agricultural land into salty, barren deserts...it is estimated that deforestation and overgrazing alone are turning six million hectares

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<sup>10</sup> Shiva, Vandana. *Biopiracy: The Plunder of Nature and Knowledge*. Cambridge, MA: South End Press, p.283

<sup>11</sup> Shiva, p.283

<sup>12</sup> Dankelman, Irene, and Joan Davidson. “Why Women?”, “The Invisible Water Managers,” and “Women’s Energy Crisis” in *Women and Environment in the Third World*. London: Earthscan Publications, p.257

of cropland into desert annually.”<sup>13</sup> Recharging the water table takes much longer than depleting it, which puts the world in serious danger of drying out water sources.<sup>14</sup> To compound the situation, water drawn for irrigation commonly never reaches its intended destination. In Asia, this occurs at rates of seventy to eighty percent.<sup>15</sup> This poor use of water contributes to the depletion of the world’s currently tired sources. Wood used for industrial fuel shipped from far away rural area is a major cause of deforestation. “Studies have shown that around Ouagadougou, Dakar, and Niamey, a deforested ‘ring of desolation’ is the result of this traffic.”<sup>16</sup> Deforestation affects the accessibility of clean water and oxygen, which are vital for survival. Expectedly, all of these development projects have negative affects beyond environmental degradation. Specifically, third-world women feel the affects of these environmental problems in a more negative way than the men in their communities.

The affects of the aforementioned environmental problems caused by development strategies in third-world countries are felt first and foremost by women in these communities. “Green Revolution practices reduced the availability of fertile land and the genetic diversity of crops, thereby creating scarcity.”<sup>17</sup> This scarcity increases the burden carried by women to feed and provide sustenance for their family. When food is scarce, women walk longer distances to find it and spend more of their day on one aspect of survival. This takes away from time that needs to be spent in many other life sustaining areas. The destruction of the mangrove forest caused by the Esteros Project in Colombia caused the demise of the piangua population, a type of fish that Colombian women relied on to feed their families. “A research team concluded that the

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<sup>13</sup> Dankelman and Davidson, p.252

<sup>14</sup> Dankelman and Davidson, p.252

<sup>15</sup> Dankelman and Davidson, p.252

<sup>16</sup> Dankelman and Davidson, p.258

<sup>17</sup> Shiva, p.284

destruction of the Rhizophora (Mangrove) forest would have an effect on the productivity of estuarine organisms that depend on that habitat during part of their life cycle. More severe, however, would be the impact on the income of the women in the fishing village of Salahonda.”<sup>18</sup> After dredging and excavation had begun, researchers found that piangua catch declined significantly.<sup>19</sup> Colombian women felt this decrease in a necessary food source most negatively because they were forced to find alternative ways to feed their families. Additionally, the lack of water that occurs because of droughts that are caused by development projects add stress to Third World women’s lives. When drinkable water is scarce, women are forced to walk miles to obtain it and carry heavy loads across long distances in order to cook, bathe, and provide for their families. Women are hit hardest by water shortage because they have to worry about where to collect water, how to transport it, how many sources can be used and their quality for different purposes, and how to purify drinking water. Mexican pioneer women cited the fear of running out of water when asked to discuss their concerns with the depletion of the rainforest.<sup>20</sup> As one can see in Raphael Tenthani’s article, “Sisters are Tapping it for Themselves”, water shortage is also a fear felt by women located near Africa’s third largest lake. A thirty three year old mother of four typically draws five buckets of water a day even though her family usually uses much less. “We usually only use two pails but I keep the others just in case.”<sup>21</sup> In addition to worries about water collection, the deforestation that commonly occurs in Third World countries to feed the West’s fuel consumption makes firewood difficult to obtain, another burden

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<sup>18</sup> Dankelman and Davidson, p.257

<sup>19</sup> Dankelman and Davidson, p.257

<sup>20</sup> Townsend, Janet Gabriel. “Pioneer Women and the destruction of the rainforests” in H. Collinson(ed), *Green Guerillas: Environmental Conflicts and Initiatives in Latin America and the Caribbean*. Montreal: Black Rose Books, p.275

<sup>21</sup> Tenthani, Raphael. “Sisters are Tapping it for Themselves” in *The New Internationalist*. December 2002, p.289

felt mostly by women. “The boys have nothing to do. For girls it’s different. We have to look after the family collecting firewood as before, but we have to walk further each day to find any” (Sara, an Ethiopian refugee of 14 living in a Somalian camp).<sup>22</sup> This lack of firewood causes women to resort to unhealthy measures. They are forced to use biomass fuels instead of firewood for cooking and heat, which causes indoor pollution resulting in adverse health affects. “Wood fuels are capable of producing pollution concentrations higher than fossil fuels under slow burning conditions and some studies have shown that cooks suffer from more smoke and pollutants than residents of the dirtiest urban environments.”<sup>23</sup> Because women are the cooks for their families, they suffer these adverse health affects most of the time. It is apparent in Janet Gabriel Townsend’s article, “Pioneer Women and the Destruction of the Rainforest”, that women in rural Mexico worry about the depletion of the rainforest because they fear it will affect the future of their children. “As a woman, you think about the welfare of your children, and if they cut down all the trees, they’ll leave the forest destroyed and a desert. The women want to see a better future for all of so that we may breathe clean air” (Catalina).<sup>24</sup> The stress felt by women to maintain the lifestyle of their family under these deteriorating conditions makes it difficult for them to complete all tasks necessary for survival. The connection between development projects, environmental degradation, and third-world women’s live is apparent when noticing that development projects cause environmental degradation and this deterioration makes the lives of third-world women more difficult.

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<sup>22</sup> Dankelman and Davidson, p.259

<sup>23</sup> Dankelman and Davidson, p.261

<sup>24</sup> Townsend, p.276

According to Malthusian Population Law, population grows geometrically while food production proceeds arithmetically.<sup>25</sup> This means that eventually there will not be enough food or space to accommodate the growing population. This idea is based on ‘natural fertility’; that is, unchecked, uncontrolled human fertility with no recourse to contraception or birth control, implying a purely unconscious, biological process.<sup>26</sup> Third-world women heavily critique this idea. “An eco-feminist perspective is not to look at reproduction in isolation, but to see it in the light of men-women relations, the sexual division of labor, sexual relations and the overall economic, political, and social situation, all of which, at present, are influenced by patriarchal and capitalist ideology and practice.”<sup>27</sup> There is more to overpopulation than ignorance among women. Many women in Third World countries must have children in order to survive. Children help women cook, collect firewood, and do many other things to ensure their survival. Having another child in the Third World does not cost significantly more than having one child. This is not true in the West. A Western child consumes 125 times more than a child from the Third World. The First World has approximately twenty five percent of the world’s population, consumes seventy percent of the world’s energy, seventy five percent of it’s metals, and eighty five percent of it’s wood.<sup>28</sup> According to third-world feminists, Western ideals and development strategies cause women in Third World countries to have many children because childbearing is their purpose. In order to reduce the growth of populations in these countries, according to third-world feminists, social and economic programs must be implemented rather than medical

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<sup>25</sup> Mies, Maria, and Vandana Shiva. “People for Population: Towards a New Ecology of Reproduction” in K. K. Bhavanani(ed), *Feminism and ‘Race’*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, p.306

<sup>26</sup> Mies and Shiva, P 306

<sup>27</sup> Mies and Shiva, p.309

assistance because, contrary to Malthusian logic, women have been well versed in contraceptive methods since the dawn of time.

It is difficult to re-imagine a world with environmental justice in these women's lives. Although it is unfeasible to reach this goal, there are many things that could help their environmental situation. In order to achieve environmental justice, women need to be involved. Women have always been considered gentle and nurturing, which is why they are correlated with saving the environment. Women of the Third World play a critical role in protecting the environment for two reasons: Women are the main managers of local resources, and women often have the knowledge about sustainable development in their environment. A successful development program implemented to increase the efficiency of stoves, the ILO/World Bank Stoves Feasibility Project in Ethiopia, attributes its success to the utilization of women's knowledge in Addis Ababa. Because women are the users of these projects, they should be involved from the start.<sup>29</sup> Involving women from the start is the key element in successful development programs that are not harmful to the environment.

The issue of reproductive rights in the lives of Third-world women is a problem more difficult to grasp than environmental justice. In order to attain such a goal, many steps must be taken. First, instead of implementing contraceptive plans without regular checkups, a new system of health care needs to be implemented. In order for these birth control methods to be effective, they need to be monitored and the affects they are having on women's health need to be recorded. Also, there are a vast amount of social and economic steps that would need to be taken in order to give women in the Third World reproductive rights. If women could be guaranteed necessary staples like food, water, and shelter, then they would not have to continually reproduce

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<sup>29</sup> Dankelman and Davidson, p.263

in order to survive. Also, if women were valued for anything beyond their ability to bear children, they would not feel like their worth was established by the number of children they have. Again, women need to play a part in the decision-making process involving reproductive rights. When women are involved in deciding instead of being forced to do things, success is much more likely. In order to achieve reproductive rights, similarly to environmental justice, women's knowledge must be properly utilized. Due to the fact that women are the most knowledgeable about survival and their environment, they often carry the burden of supporting their family, which is why they feel the affects of environmental degradation first. Development projects, which cause environmental degradation, are closely connected with the lives of Third-world women because of these affects that they feel. In order to reduce population growth, according to Third-world feminists, social plans that ensure the survival of families are necessary and the people from the West need to consider the advice and knowledge of women when making these plans. Utilizing women and their knowledgeable resources is instrumental in re-imagining environmental justice and reproductive rights for third-world women.

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