

SESSION IV: GENDER LENS IN INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS

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Shaojun Chen, Professor, Hohai University “Bridging the Gender Gap in Development Projects: A Gender Impact Assessment (GIA) of Resettlement in a Hydropower Project in China”

The National Research Center for Resettlement in China was established in 1993 and planners did not initially identify the issue of gender as a requirement in planning assessments for infrastructure projects. It was incorporated later. The questions to consider are: what is gender mainstreaming, why should gender impacts be considered in project planning, and how?

According to Shaojun’s historical overview, the concept of gender mainstreaming came to prominence at the 1985 Third World Conference on Women, which took place in Nairobi, Kenya. It was also cited in the document that resulted from the conference, the Beijing Platform for Action. Ideally, gender mainstreaming offers a mixed approach that values the diversity of different populations and genders. In particular, it examines the impact of development projects through a gender lens to ensure that equal benefits accrue to men and women who are affected by the planning, construction, and operation of proposed initiatives. Gender mainstreaming is a process of assessing the different implications for people of different genders of any planned policy action, including legislation and programs. This policy approach also requires organizational change and the introduction of a holistic investigation into the interconnected roots and patterns of the imbalance in relations among all genders in all areas of life. In this context, Chen says, “promoting gender equality is smart development policy” (2019). By incorporating gender analysis, Shaojun feels that projects and outcomes will be more sustainable. Gender mainstreaming as a planning tool also serves to avoid or minimize the negative impact of development projects on the lives of women.

Despite the perceived benefits of this gender-inclusive approach, Shaojun notes that it is not easy to integrate gender perspectives into the project planning cycle. For the particular project she discussed, this cycle comprised six steps: (1) collecting data, (2) establishing context, (3) identifying issues, (4) understanding needs, (5) gender planning and implementation, and (6) review and reporting. These six steps are key to preparing

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and implementing a Gender Action Plan (GAP), which is similar to a social action plan, but which centers gender issues.

In the water case study Shaojun presented, the objectives for planners included improving the human endowments of the project, providing better jobs, closing the gap between men and women in terms of the ownership and control of assets, and allowing space for the expression of women's voices and agency. In summarizing her experience with gender mainstreaming for this project, Shaojun noted that it offered a pluralistic resolution that empowered women.

Question & Answer Session

Alice: When women's voices are not valued in patriarchal spaces, how does one ensure women's voices are heard and what affirmative action measures can planners take?

Shaojun: As a researcher in rural China, women often tell me that they are not in a position to speak and that they must defer to the male head of the household. Education efforts to create awareness, such as those that the All China Women's Federation (ACWF) undertakes, are helpful. Planners are trying to be more diligent about integrating women's perspectives into policies and are making efforts to consult with women. It's also important to ensure that the gender action plan is actionable and includes measures to target project and government funding towards action items. For planners in rural China, another important issue is the impact of returning urban migrants, especially among women. Overall, it is not easy to implement gender mainstreaming and getting the consensus to do so is a step-by-step process.

Adeel: There is always a balance between quantitative measures and qualitative narratives. Is there a gravitational pull to numbers?

Shaojun: Initially, the government could not understand the rationale for gender mainstreaming and did not comprehend how that might capture social risks. Pressure from the World Bank to consider gender issues helped to set a baseline, and that experience made it easier to include the requirement in the planning of other infrastructure projects.

Comments from Mohammad: In response to a flooding crisis in 1998, the Asian Development Bank required the client, who had no such pre-existing guidelines, to consider issues of gender. That is, the influence and input from external consultants helped to shape new policy and planning approaches. The requirement to consider issues from a gender perspective has now become an established part of developing large infrastructure projects in China, whether such projects are funded domestically or internationally.

Mohammad also stressed that without the active participation of women at all levels of decision-making, the goal of equality cannot be achieved. He noted that institutions must make efforts to broaden women's roles so that women and men are equally represented in any decision-making. Similarly, budgeting from a gender perspective helps to address gender-based concerns such as the hierarchies that have an impact and influence on funding decisions.

Veronica: Is gender budgeting or gender-response budgeting required?

Shaojun: Not yet. The focus remains on the preparation of a gender action plan as part of project feasibility studies. Budgets may include line items for social capacity-building initiatives, education programs for women, and other such efforts.

**Zafar Adeel, Professor and Executive Director, Pacific Water Research Centre
(PWRC), Simon Fraser University
“Women and Water in the Arab Region”**

In Zafar Adeel’s work, a guiding principle is to consider water security an entry point for empowering refugee women as agents of change. Adeel noted that according to the UN, water security is the capacity of a population to safeguard sustainable access to adequate quantities of acceptable quality water for sustaining livelihood, human wellbeing, and socio-economic development, for ensuring protection against water-borne pollution and water-related disasters, and for preserving ecosystems in a climate of peace and political stability. For the UN system and for UN-Water, this definition is the starting point for dialogue. Thus, UN-Water supports the inclusion of water security on the agenda of the UN Security Council and the integration of water security into the post-2015 development agenda as part of the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals. Estimates are that 1.8 billion people will live in regions with absolute water scarcity and almost half of the world will live in conditions of water stress by 2025. Parts of India, China, the Middle East, and Africa are especially vulnerable.

Adeel explained that the idea of empowering refugee women as agents of change was the central focus of a 2018 symposium held in Beirut, Lebanon called “Women, Water Security, and Peace-building in the Arab Region.” He noted that ongoing water insecurity characterizes the Arab region, including declining water resources, a dramatic decrease in water availability per capita, and the impacts of climate change. While some countries rely on desalination, this is an expensive process that is not available or practicable for all. Another obstacle to overcome is the contamination and depletion of groundwater resources, and there is an increasing interest in the possibility of capturing and reusing wastewater.

Overall, the focus is on consumption, which is the defining concern when looking to the future. Among consumers in the region, there are 14 million refugees of which approximately 60% are women. The 17 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the region form an even larger constituency. Since the majority of these vulnerable populations are women, they bear the brunt of life’s challenges including adverse effects on personal welfare and wellbeing.

While men often remain in conflict zones, families move away and women become the household leaders. In doing so, they are subject to abuse and violence in the struggle over scant resources. Deteriorating conditions mean that armed groups and human traffickers hold women captive. Equally frightening threats exist in refugee and internally displaced persons (IDP) camps, as explained by a UNHCR report that states, “In many refugee situations, particularly those involving the confinement of refugees in closed camps, traditional behavioral norms and restraints break down. In such circumstances refugee women and girls may be raped by other refugees.” The frustration of camp life can also lead to violence, including physical, emotional, and sexual abuse within families. This is according to narratives women presented at the Beirut symposium, including stories of young girls disappearing at night after leaving their beds to use the washroom facilities.

To contend with these various issues, one planning and policy approach is to think of women as water resource managers and develop their ability to be self-sufficient. In fact, in an increasingly water-stressed situation, women and girls face the risk of ongoing danger, instability, and conflict when they are not involved in water sector management and decision-making processes. As noted, this is troubling not only for gender equity, but for peace and security as well. Women's involvement entails empowering women to participate in male-dominated professions and break stereotypes of what women can do. For example, a German-initiated project in Jordan trains women to become plumbers. This initiative and others recognize women as agents of change. It is about building capacity as well as awareness that women cannot be considered or treated as a single, uniform, and undifferentiated block.

To continue pursuing projects along these lines, the Arab League has established a Leadership Task Force. The regional focus is on the countries of Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey, and Yemen. Initiatives will be geared toward implementing programs to address three key areas through a mechanism of five-year plans: (1) education, (2) livelihoods, and (3) collaboration. Above all, the imperative is to address the ways in which women can be instrumental in change, particularly in post-conflict reconstruction efforts.

Question & Answer Session

Reema: What is the impact of government corruption on these projects and initiatives?

Adeel: There are problems. For example, if funding is syphoned off, it acts as a disincentive to donors. There are ongoing attempts to improve governance, but in many respects the capacity is not there. However, linking women's issues and water security is one way in which to create targeted mechanisms that help address governance issues.

Rebecca: What are your thoughts on the issue of climate/climate change refugees?

Adeel: The United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) does not yet recognize climate refugees as a category. Internationally, at the political level, governments resist recognizing this classification. The research ambiguity, in terms of quantifying this particular issue, is one of the complicating factors in securing acceptance of the notion of climate change refugees.

Xiujie: Where are the men? What is the most difficult objective to reach?

Adeel: Empowering women is a difficult objective to reach partly because there are social and cultural barriers to what women believe may be possible. There is a social inertia that perpetuates existing ideas of gender and associated gender roles. In addition, the lack of financing and resources makes it difficult to implement programs to support change in social and cultural understandings. The need is also great. The number of vulnerable people in the regions is unprecedented in the humanitarian and development world. Training also has to be directed to men and women because, for example, the majority of relief workers are men.

Aman: How do you position "the ask" for donors?

Adeel: For European and North American organizations, a gender lens and gender focus form an acceptable rationale in seeking donations. It is also effective to incorporate a specific focus, "the flavour of the month" (Adeel, 2019), to secure the attention of a particular donor or donors.

Rebecca Yoshizawa, Faculty, Kwantlen Polytechnic University
“Gender and Reproduction: An International Perspective”

Rebecca introduced herself by reviewing her academic background, which includes degrees in gender studies, communications, and sociology with an emphasis on science. Over the last 10 years, her research focus has been on reproductive biology and its connection to reproductive politics. The entry point to her work and the concepts she explores is the placenta. Rebecca noted that in the production of scientific knowledge, researchers often do not speak to or consult with pregnant women about reproduction.

In terms of framing her presentation, one of the questions Rebecca pondered was what it meant for her as a white settler to take an international perspective. To do so, she chose to explore the movement from a reproductive rights framework to one of reproductive justice and the impact such a shift has on reproductive politics. Rebecca shared her working guidelines and definition of reproductive politics. Reproduction, she argued, is not about conception and pregnancy. It is about intergenerational biological and social intimacies that sustain or end life. Within this conceptual understanding, rights are not secured forever without a fight, and it is important to consider the limitations of rights. Specifically, it is the state and the law that bestow these hard won reproductive rights. This approach individualizes the human person into a legal entity, and rights are given to individuals. The outcome is to centralize the role of the state in granting rights. However, since reproduction itself is inherently biosocial and historical, it also encompasses intersecting systems of power and oppression. Given this reality, the focus on rights is a limited view and one that is associated with a liberal feminist perspective. In contrast, a reproductive justice framework recognizes that rights are distributed unequally, and that justice is intersectional. Therefore, as Rebecca argued, the issues extend beyond reproductive rights and the pro-choice politics that center on abortion and contraception to a more comprehensive picture of what “reproductive justice” means.

Reproductive justice is a framework conceived of by racialized women and defined by the core belief that every woman has the right to decide if and when to have a baby, and to parent children in a safe environment and a healthy community without threat of either interpersonal or state violence. It means having full control over all aspects of our sexual and reproductive lives, and an end to sexual violence. Reproductive justice means that no woman or child should have to live in fear of violence in their own homes, and that victims of intimate partner violence have access to resources that allow them to escape abuse. It means not only that abortion remains legal, but that all women—including women living in poverty, who are disproportionately likely to be Black, Indigenous, and women of color—actually have access to it. That means free abortion available close to home and without barriers like mandatory waiting periods, invasive ultrasounds, or required parental consent. It means empowering all to make truly informed choices about their reproductive healthcare, from contraception to childbirth.

A framework for reproductive justice also means access to quality nutrition and care regardless of age, race, or socio-economic status, in addition to guaranteed paid maternity and/or parental leave. It provides for those performing the un-waged labor of childcare at

home, and makes free, quality childcare available to those working outside the home. This approach also allows for interrogation of the ways past injustices continue into the present, and is a more effective method of recognizing the intergenerational inheritance of trauma. It also extends the conceptualization of reproduction beyond conception and pregnancy to what transpires after birth.

Question & Answer Session

Aman: Why is there a reluctance to engage in questions about consciousness?

Rebecca: Sex-selective abortion highlights why a rights framework will not produce equality and justice. A pregnant person is greater than one and less than two. In the tradition of metaphysical individualism and liberal humanism, selfhood is bounded within a person. It is a fiction.

Adeel: Please explain more about reproductive rights and the umbrella of human rights.

Rebecca: Within a legal framework, rights are not equally enjoyed, and they are not equally accessible. When society views reproductive politics through the lens of rights, it fails to see the entirety of what must be done to achieve equality. The framework of rights can be extended only if society thinks of reproduction through a lens of justice.

Sanzida: What do we mean by reproductive rights? How broad and encompassing is your definition? Where does surrogacy fall?

Rebecca: In a rights framework, persons have rights, and the state grants personhood.