

# Introduction

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The papers in this special edition of *Africa Development* are part of the outcome of CODESRIA's first Gender Institute, held in 1994. They were not originally intended as articles for *Africa Development*. However, owing to their quality and scope and after following the normal processes of peer-review, CODESRIA decided to devote a special issue to them, in order to share the development of this approach with the rest of the African scholarly community.

The Gender Institute was itself an outcome of a CODESRIA workshop on Gender Analysis in African Social Science in September 1991.<sup>1</sup> At that workshop, scholars critiqued the gender biases of dominant social science research and teaching in Africa. They also recommended that an annual Gender Institute be started, in order to begin to counter decades of gender bias, and to develop modes of theorising and researching that take issues of gender into account. It is to CODESRIA's credit that this call was heeded.

Thus the Gender Institute has both didactic and generative objectives—hence the pun on engendering social science. On the one hand, the Gender Institute familiarises participants with the gender critiques of existing paradigms, and sensitises them to issues of gender and to the ways in which gender impacts on apparently neutral phenomena, like the production of statistics for calculating a country's gross national product. On the other hand, the Gender Institute then goes on to creatively investigate methodologies (theories and techniques) for self-consciously gendered knowledge production, and to posit solutions for issues implicated with gender asymmetries.

This two-fold emphasis on critique and simultaneously on re-creation is also marked in many of the articles in this special issue. For instance, Hannington Ochwada, following Tiyaambe Zeleza (1996), takes the known categories of historiography and shows the gender biases and blindness built

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<sup>1</sup> The workshop was reported fully in *CODESRIA Bulletin* No.4, 1991. Some of the papers from that workshop, plus some others specially commissioned, are presently in press and will be forthcoming in 1996 as *Engendering African Social Sciences (Engen(d)rer les science sociales en Afrique)*, edited by Ayesha M Imam, Fatou Sow and Amina Mama.

into their conceptual frameworks, demonstrating his point in Kenyan historiography. On the basis of this, he then discusses the necessary means for a fully gendered 'his- and her-story'. Such a form of historiography 'challenges traditional assumptions and problematics and seeks to restore women to history while accounting for men's experience in an equal vein which does not invisibilise either sex'.

Similarly, Codou Bop's article, based on studies in Dakar and St. Louis in Senegal, disputes the assumptions that women are household heads only by force of circumstance rather than a choice for autonomy, and that women-headed households are necessarily poor. She analyses how the different situations of women as household heads have different implications, as well as pointing out the areas of common discrimination and vulnerability. The evidence she marshals challenges also the dominant gender 'ideological reference system' (Sow 1994) that men are the breadwinners for their families. On the contrary, fewer fathers than mothers take full and sole responsibility for the maintenance of their children, and this increasingly includes households where a man is regularly present. Bearing this in mind, Bop proposes a new concept, that of 'women-supported households', rather than women headed households, and proceeds to demonstrate its utility.

While Ochwada makes a call for a discipline-wide incorporation of gender analysis, regardless of subject of study, several of the articles are inter-disciplinary studies of a specific subject of study and fall within the more familiar rubric of women's studies. Aminata Sow contributes to the literature on gender in development. In her study in the Casamance area of Senegal, Sow shows how 'modernisation' and 'development' persistently take forms which are anti-women's interests. She demonstrates the sexist comportment of the development agency, PRIMOCA, and of its assumptions about development. The bias against women in access to resources, particularly land, was exacerbated by the project, and women were not given access to credit either. Further, although women owned cattle, they were neither consulted nor involved in the dairy production project. PRIMOCA provided health and welfare schemes for the community through the use of women's reproductive labour, but focused on addressing men's production issues. However, when consulted, women focused on solutions for their production problems also.

Bola Udegbe also focuses on development for rural women in her evaluation of the Better Life for Rural Women Programme (BLP) in Nigeria. Despite the awards and favourable international media attention it received, Udegbe points out several flaws in the programme's conception and execution. BLP was top-down and elitist in administration. Udegbe's study of rural women's experiences with BLP found that they felt that access to BLP depended on having 'connections' to the administration.

Second, women felt that there was little clarity about what and how BLP would function. Further, women's expectations of programme were disappointed, often after they had made investments in membership. Udegbe points out that BLP's objectives reinforced women's subordination by emphasising women's roles as home-maker and mother. BLP aimed merely at alleviating some of rural women's immediate needs. Since the programme's administrative capacity and the mode of determination of rural women's needs was inadequate, overall even this circumscribed objective had limited success. Udegbe concludes that the huge fanfare and subsequent failures of the BLP have made it even more difficult in the future to mobilise women.

With Babatunde Ahonsi's article on demographic change and sustainable development, and Jeanne Nanitelamio's study of conjugal relations among the Bakongo, there is a shift to using gendered analysis outside of women's studies. Ahonsi carefully delineates his gendered understanding, and re-evaluates existing data on sub-Saharan African demographic change and ecology in its light. He then goes on to make some recommendations to support sustainable development. Nanitelamio's re-analysis of her own data finds that a gender analysis enables consideration of 'the dynamic of power relations in conjugal relations'. Her study, moving from the pre-colonial period through the one-party state highlights the conflicts, uncertainties and changing developments in marriage relations. She relates these to changes in the matrilineal system towards patrilineality and increased patriarchy. They were also influenced by state pronouncements on women's 'new status', which proclaimed an equality that did not consider changes for men's roles and behaviour, or provide the means of building women's status. Her interviews with women and men show that they negotiate from different vantage points and sites of power.

All the papers raise important questions about the nature of gender relations or the contributions of gender analysis to knowledge. For instance, Ahonsi's scrupulous analysis points to factors like women's lack of access to land and to capital, their relative inability to control the products of their own labour, and the allocation of reproductive work to women in the gender division of labour within the household as both gender inequitable and obstacles to sustainable development. Yet his recommendations for 'gender-equitable and participatory development' are limited to improving women's education and access to reproductive health services. He does not touch on the possibilities of improving women's access to land and credit, or changing gender relations so that women control their own work and share reproductive work with men. Hence, Ahonsi's paper raises the thorny question of not simply knowledge, but also political will in addressing gender issues.

Udegbe's paper raises similar questions of a conceptual nature. She refers to the distinction often made between practical gender needs (immediate needs for things like potable water, health care and so on) and strategic gender needs (measures which challenge present inequalities in gender relations). However, as she points out, a programme intended as a tool of empowering women and maximising their contribution to development, needs to satisfy both immediate needs and simultaneously to diffuse power relations and change gender relations. Many African governments have been willing to attempt to meet immediate needs for roads and wells and market gardens... but they shy away from measures to overcome women's subordination — like changing gender divisions of labour and improving women's access to power and resources. The mistake is to consider that immediate and long-term needs can be separated and satisfied independently of each other. The failures of BLP itself show that without situating the satisfaction of immediate needs within a long-term perspective even the immediate needs are unlikely to be met, at least not in a sustainable manner.

The papers also reveal gaps and raise areas for further research. Ochwada points to the lack of attention that has been paid to women's history generally, as well as specifically to the history of pre-colonial periods. Sow's article indicates the necessity of taking account of the ideological values that have historically been built into economic valuations, i.e. by the values which define what is, or is not, considered as productive and worthwhile work. As she states 'women's invisibility is explained by the non-valorisation of their domestic work, and by the under-estimation of their economic role'. The growth of feminist economics, which deals with issues such as this, is a crucial area for further work.<sup>2</sup>

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2 See, for example, articles by Mhone, Elson and Triki in *Engendering African Social Sciences* (forthcoming 1996). Also, the special issue of *Development and Change* (November 1995), and the journal *Feminist Economics*, particularly in Africa where so much labour is in non-monetised or non-market sectors of the economy. Finally, Nanitelamio points out a whole new series of questions that are raised by gendered analysis. The contributors to this special issue of *Africa Development* have thus both contributed to expanding our knowledge and understanding of gender analysis and gendered issues, and pointed out fruitful directions and possibilities for further work.

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