



Gender, Poverty and Sustainable Development

Towards a holistic framework
of understanding and action

Vivienne Wee
Noeleen Heyzer

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Vivienne Wee
Noeleen Heyzer

assisted by

Aileen Kwa

Julia On

Ian LI-Anne

Chan Tse Chueen

ENGENDER

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ENGENDER

Formed in 1992, ENGENDER is an autonomous regional organisation working on issues related to environment, gender and development. These issues are particularly relevant in Asia and the Pacific—a region currently undergoing tremendous social, economic, political and ecological change.

ENGENDER strives to make visible and viable, patterns of sustainability and equity on which enduring livelihoods can be based. Our vision is to work towards the rethinking of critical development issues by reviewing alternatives to current development strategies, in a way that would prevent mistakes of past development models. The aim is to contribute to the formulation of development strategies, policies and programmes that would promote ecological sustainability in the long term, as well as gender and social equity for all sectors of society.

ENGENDER has been actively involved in the preparatory process of the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing. In November 1993, ENGENDER co-ordinated four workshops on 'Women, Environment and Development' at the *Asian and Pacific Symposium of Non-Governmental Organisations on Women in Development*—the first regional NGO preparation for the World Conference on Women. During the Thirty-ninth session of the Commission on the Status of Women, New York, March 1995, ENGENDER co-ordinated a workshop on 'Women in the NICs, the Near NICs and the Aspiring NICs,' jointly hosted by UNIFEM and the Asian and Pacific NGO Working Group for the Fourth World Conference on Women. A workshop on the same issue is organised at the NGO Forum on Women '95 in Huairou / Beijing.

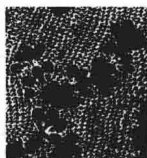
The Authors

VIVIENNE WEE is the Programme Director of ENGENDER which she co-founded. She received her PHD in anthropology at the Australian National University and lectured at the National University of Singapore from 1984 to 1994. Over the past twenty years, she has done intensive fieldwork with rural communities in the Asian region. Her research focus is on the interactions between long-term structures and short-term changes. She works with international and regional agencies, national and provincial governments, academic and research institutions, private sector organisations, NGOs and village communities. She is associated with several networks and NGOs at international, regional, and national levels. She is a founder member of AWARE (the Association of Women for Action and Research) in Singapore. She is the Research Co-ordinator on Environment and Sustainable Development in DAWN (Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era). She is the Issues Co-ordinator for Southeast Asia of the Asia and Pacific NGO Working Group for the Fourth World Conference on Women.

A co-founder of ENGENDER, NOELEEN HEYZER is currently the Director of UNIFEM, the United Nations Development Fund for Women. She received her PHD in Sociology from the University of Cambridge and was Research Officer and Visiting Fellow at the Institute of Development Studies (IDS), University of Sussex, from 1979 to 1982. From 1982 to 1984, she was Social Affairs Officer in the Social Development Division of ESCAP (Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific) in Bangkok. She was the Co-ordinator of the Gender and Development (GAD) Programme at the Asian and Pacific Development Centre (APDC) in Kuala Lumpur from 1984 to 1994. She is a founding member of DAWN (Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era) in which she was the Regional Co-ordinator for Southeast Asia from 1985 to 1994. From 1993 to 1994, she was the Substantive Focal Point for the Asia and Pacific NGO Working Group for the Fourth World Conference on Women. She is the author or editor of 11 books and more than 20 articles and papers on development and women's issues.

This book is dedicated to the women whose lives and livelihoods have been put at risk by unsustainable and inequitable development processes.

Their courage, wisdom and determination in the face of overwhelming odds give us hope in the possibility of a better human future.



The design on the front cover is a Javanese *batik* print.

The making of *batik* is a women's craft requiring extraordinary patience, sometimes over hundreds of hours of painstaking labour. But their artistry is undervalued and women *batik* artists work for low wages in harsh conditions of employment.

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Guide to acronyms

APDC	Asian and Pacific Development Centre
APEC	Asia Pacific Economic Co-operation
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CSW	Commission on the Status of Women
DAWN	Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era
EPZ	Export Processing Zone
FAO	Food and Agricultural Organisation
GAD	Gender and Development
GED	Gender-Equitable Development
GATT	General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs
ICPD	International Conference on Population Development
IDS	Institute of Development Studies
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
ILO	International Labour Organisation
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IWDA	International Women's Development Agency
IWHC	International Women's Health Coalition
IWRAW	International Women's Rights Action Watch
NIC	Newly-Industrialised Country
NGO	Non-governmental organisation

OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
SAP	Structural Adjustment Policy
SEZ	Special Economic Zone
TNC	Transnational Corporation
WAD	Women and Development
WEDO	Women's Environment and Development Organisation
WCED	World Commission on Environment and Development
WCW	World Conference on Women
WFS	Women's Feature Service
WID	Women in Development
WSSD	World Summit on Social Development
UNCED	United Nations Conference on Environment and Development
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNEP	United Nations Environmental Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNFPA	United Nations Fund for Population Activities
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNIFEM	United Nations Development Fund for Women
UNRISD	United Nations Research Institute for Social Development
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

Preface

The aim of this book is to make a substantive contribution to the critical rethinking of development. The purpose is to forge a holistic and gender-sensitive analysis of the development processes that have led to our current crisis of unsustainability and poverty.

As this crisis deepens, the need to rethink development has become increasingly urgent. In response to this need, the United Nations organised a recent series of international conferences to assess the global situation and to seek global solutions. This book thus begins by reviewing the international consensus that has been achieved at these conferences. Women played a major role at these conferences and the issue of gender was particularly significant as a linkage theme. Although the themes of these four recent conferences—environment, human rights, population and poverty—were not conventionally regarded as ‘women’s issues’, a consensus achieved is the recognition that gender cross-cuts all issues. Women thus made important gains at these UN conferences.

However, there are serious gaps between the rhetoric of the international declarations and a real world of unsustainable and inequitable development processes. A major reason for these gaps is the absence of a systematic analysis of the structural causes of poverty. No attention is given to the possibility that the existing economic order based on rapid industrialisation and the intensive drawing of resources from the periphery to the city may be responsible for the destruction of existing livelihood systems, especially in rural areas.

To fill this lacuna, this book provides a systematic analysis of wealth and poverty as the simultaneous outcome of the same development process. It points out that in a world of finite resources, wealth is ‘created’ through the ‘shadow subsidies’ provided by women and the environment. The result is that the beneficiaries of ‘development’ do not include one and all, as is often assumed. Indeed, benefits do not even ‘trickle down’. ‘Development’ can generate very different consequences for women and men, for the poor and the rich, and for rural and urban populations.

This holistic analysis also reveals the intrinsic linkage between unsustainability and poverty. There can no sustainability if half the world’s population are deprived and dispossessed of livelihood resources. Yet

women's lives and livelihoods are put increasingly at risk, resulting in the feminisation of poverty. Women now constitute seventy per cent of the world's 1.3 billion absolute poor. Women's indivisible and inalienable human rights—including their livelihood rights—are therefore a developmental issue of crucial importance.

The book also offers a critique of obsolete development strategies referred to as 'trickle down', 'basic needs' and 'structural adjustments'. These development strategies of the last five decades have been ineffective in breaking the cycle of poverty and in bringing about sustainable development. The present global crisis itself indicates the extent to which development policies—nationally, regionally and globally—have been inadequate in their attempts to solve the problems of food, shelter, education, health and other such basic needs. What is worse, there is a lack of policy coherence as these different strategies are often mixed together in a 'policy cocktail' that tries to meet what are often incompatible goals.

If the old development strategies had met with policy failure in the last five decades, they are even more inadequate now and cannot address the newer forces and problems that have arisen in recent years. Despite this, these strategies persist as the props of an archaic, *laissez-faire*, neo-liberal economics that is incapable of addressing the environmental and social crisis of our time. The current economic system creates value out of scarcity. Every degraded natural resource becomes a market niche for a scarce product, hence generating economic opportunity. Poverty is not even an issue addressed within this economic system. Instead, it can be an advantage for some as it creates an ample supply of cheap labour.

This critique of current development processes draws upon illustrations from the Asian and Pacific region. The region is focussed upon, because the 'miracle economies' of some countries have given rise to an 'Asian model of development' which other regions are scrambling to emulate. It is of crucial importance, therefore, that the negative underside of this growth is made visible.

This book shows how economic growth and impoverishment are two sides of the same coin. In a world of finite resources, it is inevitable that growth in some areas will lead to deprivation in other areas. Therefore, the high growth of some economies is derived from the extraction of resources from other, lower-growth, economies. The argument is made that these high-growth economies stand at the peak of a resource pyramid that is analogous to a food chain. The inter-connections between the different

levels of growth can be traced through the flow of resources channelled in particular directions.

This book ends by working out approaches to a strategy of transformation that will restore balance to the current ecological and social imbalance. The core values of such a strategy must include gender equity, social justice and ecological responsibility. This strategy must involve all sectors and levels of society—including state, market and civil society. Women—with so much to lose in the current situation and so much to gain from a sustainable and equitable future—must be in the forefront of this process of global transformation.

The crisis of unsustainability and poverty discussed in this book is a growing phenomenon. No process of research and analysis can catch up with its 'growth'. The purpose, however, is not to catch up but to halt it. ENGENDER welcomes a long-term dialogue with you on this important issue. Please write to us at the following address:

Centre for Environment, Gender and Development (ENGENDER) Pte Ltd
14c Trengganu Street

Singapore 0105

Republic of Singapore

Telephone [65] 2271439

Fax: [65] 2277897

E-mail: engender@technet.sg

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I

FROM RIO TO BEIJING: CLARIFYING OUR GLOBAL FOCUS

Towards an international baseline of consensus

The world has changed dramatically in the nineties. On the one hand, the end of the Cold War has opened new possibilities for the global community to move to a higher level of co-operation. On the other hand, new political formations and economic processes have led to dramatic shifts in geopolitical relationships. The number of nation states has increased—in some cases, through painful processes of fragmentation along the fault-lines of ethnicity, religion and language. Yet other countries have formed regional blocs, ceding some sovereign power to these collective blocs.

In this changing situation, fresh approaches and new knowledge are required to deal with the key issues affecting human well-being. Over the past few years, world attention has been focused on a number of UN Conferences as windows of opportunity whereby global solutions may be sought for global problems. These Conferences have been path breaking either in