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GENDER AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT:
A FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE

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GENDER AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT: A FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE

By Thanh-Dam Truong

Abstract

This article seeks to clarify the different contexts from which discussions on Human Development (henceforth HD) have emerged, and how such contexts have attributed specific meanings and methodologies to promote HD. The article demonstrates that there are differences in the modes of understanding about 'human' and 'development', and without a clear distinction between these modes, an integration of these two terms can lead to much confusion. Reviewing the debate from a feminist standpoint shows that the dominant discourses on human development is so far overtly patriarchal, despite recent attempts to include gender in its framework of analysis. The nature of patriarchal power in the HD discourses resides in (a) its ability to maintain the social meanings attached to biological sex differences derived from male-centred conventions, (b) an androcentric approach to polity which restrict the discussions to freedom and justice at the expense of care. Traces of such conventions may be found in the conception of social power and the subject, and in the conception of the economy. In this regard, a feminist engagement with the HD debate and its rhetoric on gender equality must move beyond the level of norms and institutions and tackle the underlying symbolic structure.

I. Introduction

Human development encompasses two meanings which are inter-related. The first meaning refers to a development model, oriented towards human needs, which promotes more humane values and respects the totality of human existence. The second meaning refers to a development model which places the human actor at the centre stage in the development process. As such, human development is not a new concept. It was prevalent many debates on social reforms in the late 1960's and early 1970's, stimulated primarily by social alienation, unrest, environmental pollution caused by large-scale industries in the West and 'maldevelopment' in the Third World. Human development was grounded on issues such as scale, organizational forms of production, limits to economic growth, and an enhancement of human beings as subjects, i.e., conscious authors of social processes.

The economic crisis of the late 1970s and 1980s has superseded much of the momentum in demands for reforms to promote human development in the West. This momentum was renewed since the late 1990's, stimulated by a range of factors, old and new. A new major factor appears to be the differences in economic performance of countries and regions during the last two decades that cannot be explained by external conditions alone. The fact that several East and South East Asian countries have managed to maintain a high and sustained growth rate during a period of global crisis has led policy makers and academics to devote more attention to the area of human capital and human resources as a possible venue of explanation. Empirical data indicates that this growth has generally been stimulated by small and medium production units and a social policy which places considerable emphasis on health and education, i.e., human resources (Riedel, 1998; Vogel, 1991). Proposed reforms for human development today tend to point to East Asia as a possible model. Here, rather than advocating limits to growth, the new framework for human development establishes a causal link between economic growth, social, cultural and institutional reforms.

In this regard, it is important to clarify the different contexts from which discussions on Human Development (henceforth HD) have emerged, and how such contexts attribute specific meanings and methodologies to promote HD. This article demonstrates that there are differences in the modes of understanding about 'human' and 'development', and without a

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clear distinction between these modes, an integration of these two terms can lead to much confusion. In clarifying these differences, it is hoped that an interchangeable use of terms can be avoided (i.e. human development, human capital, human resources development, human-scale development, human-centred development, people-centred development). Although such terms may express a common concern over the human side of social change, they do not capture the same dimension of human existence, nor do they share the same claims in regard to ethics and knowledge. An understanding of the plurality of meanings of human development may help to appreciate and evaluate each meaning in its own merit.

A review of the HD debate from a feminist standpoint shows how the dominant discourses on HD to date are overtly patriarchal, despite recent attempts to include gender in its framework of analysis. The nature of patriarchal power in the HD discourses resides in (a) its ability to maintain the social meanings attached to biological sex differences derived from male-centred conventions, and (b) an androcentric approach to polity which restricts the discussions on HD to freedom and justice at the expense of care. Traces of such conventions may be found in the conception of social power and the subject, and in the conception of the economy. In this respect, a feminist engagement with the HD debate and its rhetoric on gender equality must move beyond the level of norms and institutions and tackle the underlying symbolic structure.

II   Human Development: A Prelude to the UNDP framework

Debates on social reforms in the 1960s and 1970s which introduced human development explicitly as a concept may be delineated into three major trends. They address the fields of knowledge, morality and law respectively, but not exclusively. The first trend was directed at the critique of industrial societies expressed in critical theory as represented by the works of Marcuse, Fromm and Habemas. A major feature of this body of work is the critique of Positivism and the rational-instrumental approach for explaining social life. The main argument is that although Positivism emerged in an age of humanism (the Enlightenment), it has delivered dehumanized results owing to its philosophical standpoints and methods, i.e., it is an approach which treats human beings as objects of observation rather than subjects in communication. Hence, the technological and administrative structure supported by this approach can only repress or misperceive human growth and creativity.

Here, considerable attention was given to the side effects of forms of technology,

automation and administration in late industrialized countries which displace and repress human creativity rather than enhancing it. The primary issue was how to humanize the realms of work and social life in order to enhance the psychic and spiritual approach to life which was seen as a major force in developing a healthy society (Fromm, 1968). Fromm (1968: 100) defined the general aim of a humanized industrial society as follows: 'the change of social, economic and cultural life of our society in such a way that it stimulates and furthers the growth and aliveness of man rather than cripples it; and that it activates the individual rather than making him passive and receptive; that our technological capacities serve man's growth'.

On the procedure of humanistic planning, Fromm (1968: 101) advocated that the 'knowledge of man, his nature, and the real possibilities of its manifestations must become one of the basic data for any social planning'. Optimal human development and not maximal production should be the criterion for all planning. Fromm (1968) argues that 'dehumanized humanism' could be overcome through activation, responsibility, and participation. In other words, rather than being treated as an object of observation and planning, the individual must be treated as a subject in communication about his/her needs and aspirations. Habemas coins this 'dehumanized humanism' as the 'colonization of the life world' (i.e., increasing control over life forms by the technocratic apparatus) and identifies the way to overcome this trend through the formulation of the idea of progress that is subtle and resilient enough not to let itself be blinded by the mere appearance of emancipation (Ashley, 1990). Emancipation in the juridical sense of a society with a just arrangement of freedom is necessary. But it must be accompanied by a qualitative emancipation, i.e. enhancement of 'communicative rationality', and a mutual understanding among subjects capable of speech and action. The concrete suggestions to re-appropriate the human dimension in late industrial societies included the following: 1) bringing technology down to human-scale; 2) democratizing public spaces, i.e., organized actions that open up oppressive structures and create more space for human creativity, participation and accountability; 3) juridical reforms and cultural reforms.

From a gender standpoint, the lack of self-reflexivity within critical theory on gender specific forms of alienation and subordination has been clearly exposed in the extensive body of feminist literature. For present purposes, it suffices to note that feminist writers have rejected the androcentric interpretations of oppressive structures (state, family, work place, and psyche) which portrays women's subordination as an accidental failure of modern

democracy rather than acknowledging gender as a constitutive element in the formation of individual and collective psyche, and in shaping modern institutions. To benefit women, it is suggested that critical theory needs to ground abstract concepts (such as subject identity and its positioning in different social realms, and notions of morality and autonomy) in specific social and political contexts. Men and women do not share the same experience in the formation of subject identity. Their moral position and perception of autonomy do not evolve through similar processes due to structures of the state, family and social division of labour (Connell, 1987; Meehan, 1995; Phillips, 1991). Until the realm of political agency is understood in its totality as being gendered, and until social responses are directed at balancing gender power at all these levels, women's emancipation remains a mirage.

Although not affiliated with critical theory, Schumacher (1974) put forwards his critique of the field of economics and planning along similar lines advocated by critical theorists. His major observation was the fact that the evolution of this field in the last quarter of a century has been in the direction of quantification, at the expenses of understanding qualitative differences. That which cannot fit into the matrix of quantification have been left out, resulting in gross inefficiency, environmental pollution and inhumane working conditions. His solution to this problem is to bring human needs back to centre of economic reasoning, and to create smaller and less alienating scale of development which can incorporate rather than displace labour and human creativity.

In many ways Schumacher may be considered as one of the major forerunners in introducing the concept of human development as people-centred development in the context of the Third World. He saw the problem of extreme poverty in developing countries not as being derived from material causes such as the lack of capital and technology. Rather, he argued that they have immaterial causes, i.e., they lie in the deficiencies in education, organization and discipline. In his view, these three elements must become the property of the entire population of a society without which all resources remain latent and untapped potentials. Through this line of argument Schumacher's work implicitly establishes a causal link between socio-economic justice and development. However, like many male authors at the time, Schumacher also fixed women's biological role as a natural role and did not see women's creativity beyond the boundaries of the family. In fact, he positioned himself against women's involvement in paid work as this would disrupt the efficiency of the economy.

It is important to point out that, despite their androcentric patterns of reasoning, these writers have generated more sensitivity to the role of human agency, the motivation and approaches to knowledge production in modern societies skewed against HD. They argued for a shift of the centre of gravity from knowledge produced for the purposes of the state and enterprises to knowledge generated by people for their own consciousness, participation and empowerment.

The second trend of thinking on human development was generated by grass-roots mobilization in different parts of the Third World, and represents a collaborative effort of different social movements and civic groups in the strife to achieve social justice through non-violent means. In the 1970's church groups became increasingly concerned with various forms social injustice, violence, and abuse faced by segments of the population who had been dispossessed by the development process. Simultaneously, there has been a growing detachment and apathy among the urban elites in Third World countries. The response of the church groups to apathy was to activate its opposite, i.e., empathy. In this context, human development was discussed primarily as moral development achieved through inter-religious dialogues (e.g., Buddhism, Christianity, Islam) aiming at releasing a new moral force to drive social change.

As has been pointed out (Asia Regional Fellowship, 1997), religions have a double role. Religious authorities and institutions can distort, manipulate, coerce, and sometimes justify violence. At the same time religious values can be inspiring and supportive and can alleviate human sufferings. Hence, the objective of many grass-roots organizations engaged in socio-economic development activities are to find common elements in different spiritual traditions that can generate empathy to foster a more active socially engagement the middle-class and intellectuals. Efforts were made to re-read ancient religious teachings to find new interpretations appropriate for contemporary situations. As Catao (1981) illustrates, the concept of love or agape in Christianity embraces the concept of justice, i.e., love in its full extension is justice. Similar efforts were made in Buddhism to promote a socially engaged Buddhism rather than one which seeks only individual salvation (de Silva, 1979). The concept of compassion and its values became a central motivating force for Buddhist social work led by urban youth and intellectuals (International Network of Engaged Buddhists, 1990).

HD in this context conveys the notion of the development of a moral consciousness

and a social engagement to alleviate the sufferings of others. HD is perceived here as a process which evolves from three main steps: exposure, empathy, transformation of the perception about the self and the relationships with others. It expresses the aspiration to non-violent relationships with others through validation rather than negation, inclusion rather than exclusion. These three steps are central in the promotion of a social engagement based on a disposition which recognizes the dignity of others (International Network of Engaged Buddhists, 1990). Omitted from the discussion is the male-female relationship, as is whether men and women share the same experience in regard to human dignity.

The third trend of thinking on human development is a legalistic one. The return to legal resources for emancipation, at least in Asia, has been a manifestation of a conscious effort to avoid violence[1]. Diokno, Chairperson of the Civil Liberties Union of the Philippines, pointed to the dilemma of development legal aid which began in ASEAN countries in the late 70's. He wrote (Diokno, 1981: 178) 'if the rights of the poor and the oppressed were to be vindicated, and just and humane development achieved, the job of developmental legal aid had to be done....They are aware that as lawyers, they must act within the law, a law that imposes severe limits on what they can do and how they do it...as citizens they are dismayed by the tremendous disparity between the armed strength of organized government and the unarmed weakness of unorganized people, and as lawyers they recoil instinctively from the bloodshed and destruction that violent revolution would cause even if it succeeded.'

To address the relationship between violence and development, the use of legal resources at the international level is required. Legal strategies led by the International Commission of Jurists was directed at linking development issues with human rights and social justice through the formulation of the right to development which integrates political, socio-economic and cultural rights. In its legal definition, human development may be understood as a state of being which can be achieved when the basic rights are guaranteed.

Initially, women's issues, such as women's paid and unpaid work and the exploitation

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[1] The violence of the Indochina war and its side effects (e.g., the brutal massacre of students' uprising in Thailand who protested against US forces in their country, the Killing fields of Pol Pot, and the dramatic exodus of the citizens from the three countries (Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia) after the revolution was completed, had led many grass-roots groups to rethink their own strategies towards social justice in development.

of women in sex tourist industry, were included in the discussions at the ICJ meeting held in Malaysia in 1981 (International Commission of Jurists and Consumers' Association of Penang, 1981), during which the concept of the 'right to development' was proposed. However, in the process of integrating socio-economic and cultural rights with political rights, the issues raised by women somehow get submerged in mainstream activities. They were treated in separate human rights instruments, i.e., the Convention for the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women, and the Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Persons and of the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others.

The right to development became endorsed by the UN General Assembly in 1986 (Eide, 1996), but it is undermined by the fundamentally androcentric nature of the international economic system, which accords far greater value to work conducted in the public sphere (male) than to women's work in the private sphere' (Charlesworth, 1995: 109). Until human rights discourses incorporate the domain of care in its cognitive structure, the recognition of women's rights in separate instruments risks creating a special branch of Women's Rights Law which may become marginalized and ghettoized (Charlesworth, 1995: 110), rather than according a transformative role to the female perspective of polity in processes of legal reforms.

Notwithstanding this dilemma with regard to gender, by grounding HD in the UN framework of human rights, two significant goals have been met. The first one is the establishment of a formal link between polity and economy, which was previously dismissed on ideological grounds due to Cold-War politics. This link enables the UN to integrate aspects of social justice with economic development objectives and to balance the conventional framework for the interpretation of development as economic progress with human elements such as security, justice, and freedom (de Gaay Fortman, 1997). The second achievement is the establishment of a set of positive standards to evaluate development action through the information generated by the Human Development Report published annually since 1990[2].

However, this integration also causes other problems. The first problem is related to the shift from critique to affirmation of Modernity with all the implications for the conception

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[2]The 1995 Human and Development sought to rectify the absence of gender in its framework of representation by including new gender indicators (GDI and GEM).

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of the state, knowledge systems, morality, consciousness and human agency. Whereas the HD debate led by critical theory which took off from a critique of instrumental reason and the modern state, questioned the potentials of 'Modernity' as one form of culture originating in Western civilization to achieve global human emancipation through the creation of 'development' in its own image, the integration of HD in the UN Human Rights framework affirms Modernity and instrumental reason and continues to treat development as a form of social engineering. Hence, this integration can subsume previous claims about the historical role of the modern state as the protector of ruling interests, and those about the political-economic structures of knowledge construction which serve such interests.

The second problem is related to the shift of the levels of HD in ethical discourse. As pointed out by Thibon in Goulet (1995: 25), early discussions on development ethics had proposed that 'ethics must somehow get inside the value dynamism of the instruments utilized by development agents, and itself become a means of the means'. It is a kind of ethical praxis which must be built into the process of knowledge construction and development intervention inspired by non-instrumentalization and non-violence as central values[3]. By contrast, the current debates on development ethics is becoming polarized around a system of positive standards of evaluation of development action (Nussbaum, 1995). Such a polarization runs the risk of subsiding the ethical question grounded in the very process of knowledge construction in support of development action.

A crucial epistemological issue emerges from elevating ethical discussions on development away from social processes, i.e., human beings becomes once again objects of observation rather than subject in communication. This shift may be noted in the position of Nussbaum who, according to (Gasper, 1996), has become an influential figure in development ethics. She writes: 'We did not make the stars, the earth, the trees: they are what they are outside us, waiting to be known. And our activities of knowing do not change what they are... On such a view, the way the human being essentially and universally is will be part of the independent furniture of the universe, something that can be in principle seen and studied independently of any experience of human life and human history (Nussbaum, 1995: 68). This position clearly elevated the position of the human being who studies other

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[3]this distinction is made only to clarify the basis premises and does not intend to claim that development intervention initiated by NGOs are free from instrumentalization.

human beings in the chair of the Creator, over looking a pre-given universe. It signifies the denial of the role of history on the ground of objectivity, and in itself it contains the seed of repression because it seeks to represent one universe within which plural forms of human needs satisfaction can take place. In this regard, the evaluative standards that emerge from this epistemological position cease to be part of an interactive process, one which seeks to build bridges between different knowledge systems rather than dams. In other words, universal commonality between human beings must be sought for through bridging different cultural systems rather than erecting protective dams around a particular framework. Therefore, Nussbaum's position must be treated an expression of a specific culture rather than as a universal view from nowhere.

Nussbaum's position is related to the universe of basic needs ethics, which is derived from the culture of development planning. Gasper (1996: 645) points out, basic needs ethics 'simply seek to establish a minimum level to which all (community members) are entitled; beyond that they can hand over to other types of ethics'. To that extent, it is understandable that a certain threshold of needs and entitlements must be established, which can only be based on a normative definition of human nature. However, by negating the role of history, this normative definition of human nature also dismisses the history of gender power in human civilization. Hence, to insist on one ethical norm for all, as Nussbaum does is to reconfirm the androcentric definition of the human being which lies at the root of women's oppression.

It is undeniable that the creation of new sets of statistical artifacts such as the Human Development Index may be seen as a change of ethical praxis within state and inter-state planning machinery, i.e., from a practice which examines mainly how the economy grows to a practice which examines also at how people fare. But it must also be acknowledged that such artifacts only constitute a universe for planners. However enlarged, this universe can never capture the real context in which people live and relate to one another. On this account, openness must be maintained with respect to whether the policy instruments recommended on the basis of the universe of the HD reports can bring about Human Development in participatory terms that: (a) foster the conscious control of men and women over their lives; (b) turn them into subjects who can communicate about their needs, views and aspirations and act on them; (c) contribute to changes in their universe; and (d) challenge the universe of planners.

III   Human Development as the Capability Approach and Gender

The work of Amartya Sen on entitlements and his views on human development as capability expansion may be seen as an important set of theoretical statements on HD in the context of public choice. In Sen's work, many previous ideas on human development have been refined. In many ways, Sen's point of departure is similar to Schumacher's views advocated a decade earlier, particularly the principle that 'development does not start with goods; it starts with people (Schumacher 1974: 140). Sen's work continues with this emphasis and creates a shift of reasoning in development economics from a logic of development based on the expansion of commodity production to one based on the expansion of human capabilities, i.e. a logic in which human beings are seen as subjects of development rather than mere objects (Sen, 1987; Crocker 1995).

His efforts aim at providing new arguments to re-prioritize the allocation of public resources in favour of human beings, their needs and capabilities to function. The merit of the capability approach lies in the link it makes between the social field and the economic field, a link which opens new grounds for analysis and action.

Sen's definition of capabilities is based on a vision which perceives human life as a set of 'doings' and 'beings', the expression of which takes place through the 'functioning' of the human being. The quality of life is placed in a causal relationship with the ability to function. There are two elementary dimensions of functioning, namely well-being (good health, education) and agency (mobility and self-respect). The capability of a person is derived from the combination levels of functioning (e.g., level of health and education) and structural determinants of agency. A person's combined actual functioning her/his 'functioning vector' is the particular life she/he actually leads (Sen 1990a). Functioning vectors can be changed by enhancing or reducing the person's set of functioning.

The functioning of persons and groups is determined by their access to primary goods (the things which people need to pursue their basic goals in life, i.e., income and wealth, basic liberties, social bases of self-respect, and the command of respect over others). Although Sen does not provide a comprehensive sociological account of primary goods, it is clear from his work that the notion of primary goods connotes two types of capital, i.e., human capital in terms of health and education, and social capital in terms of access to social networks (kinship, community, and various interests groups) which provides the social bases of dignity, respect and authority. Access to primary goods is determined by a set of social

rules and regulations, formal and informal, which is called 'entitlement systems' and which can defined by law, social norms and conventions. An entitlement is the possibility to make a legitimate claim over certain primary goods. Through the capability approach, social inequality can be analyzed in terms of: a) the differentiated access to systems of entitlements, and b) how such access in turn impacts on the welfare, well-being, and agency of individuals and groups. As such it can provide a rich analysis of both inter-gender inequality (men-women), and intra-gender inequality (men-men; women-women).

Although Sen's work shows some sensitivity to gender, the limits of his argumentation in favour of gender equality may be grounded in two areas, namely: 1) the male conception of the productive economy as the primary motor and the reproductive and care economy as derivative of nature, and 2) the silence about sexuality and body politics as a domain of power between men and women.

The omission of the domain of sexuality and the neglect of the reproductive economy in Sen's framework may result from a superficial discussion on culture and an exclusive focus on production from the outset. He writes: 'Human beings are the agents, beneficiaries and adjudicators of progress, but they also happen to be -directly or indirectly- the primary means of all production. This dual role of human beings provides a rich ground for confusion of ends and means in planning and policy-making' (Sen, 1990a: 41). This definition of human beings subsumed all women's interests under the category of production, and hence women's experiences as reproducers, if not negated, must be treated as derivatives of production rather than as being conditioned by a different set of cultural dynamics based on the social control over their bodies.

In Sen's approach, culture is narrowly treated as 'perceived legitimacy' derived from social norms and socialization (Sen, 1990b). Culture is treated as a shared collective belief, or 'world view' which forms the basis of legitimacy for action. Sen recognizes that perception biases unfavourable to women overshadow their actual agency, e.g., women's economic contributions are less recognized than men, both by men and by women themselves, and eventually affect their well-being. Hence, he holds culture responsible for gender inequality. However, his analytical framework fails to provide the scope to accommodate an analysis of culture at a deeper level, i.e., the level of assignment of symbolic meanings to social behaviour and the reaffirmation of such meanings through social practices. Without addressing culture at this level, it is not possible to apprehend gender

power based on the definition of sexual differences in all its ramifications (symbolic, normative, institutional, and experiential).

To address gender inequality adequately in its full spectrum and to provide sufficient room for the analysis of women's agency, the domain of culture must be conceptualized as being broader and deeper than the realm of social norms. Culture is also a social field of force, a site of struggle over social meanings defined by relations of power (Bourdieu, 1990). Patriarchal cultural norms are not pre-given, they reflect a particular form of ruling forged over time by history and mediated primarily through the discipline of women's bodies, their social space and roles (Lerner, 1986). Thus, apart from the links between perceptions, well-being and agency the analytical framework on gender inequality must also add the links between the control over women's bodies, their social space, agency and consciousness.

Although Sen (1990b: 149) acknowledges that for 'the most of humanity, virtually the only significant endowment is labour power,' i.e., the human body, he fails to see that the human body is symbolically and culturally sexualized. One of the major implication of this gap in Sen's work is the omission of gender-based injustice derived from the sexualization of women's identities, and how a particular 'legitimate perception' of women's sexuality can facilitate different forms of commodification of women's bodies (e.g., through visual images and direct services), or deny them access to resources. In many instances, pressures on women to sell their bodies begins in the household. State policy and law can facilitate such pressures as much as social conventions (Truong, 1990).

For women, it is important not to let the analysis of the process of commodification of labour power stop at the level of muscle and brain. The process which converts human sexuality as a domain of intimacy into female sexuality as a commodity is historically related to male privileges and entitlements over female bodies. To reverse this trend requires a direct confrontation with such privileges and entitlements, which must begin with the acknowledgement of forms of gender-based injustice derived from a particular conception of sexuality, and how such forms of injustice affect women's well-being.

To some extent, Kabeer's analysis of gender relations and poverty (1994) based on Sen's framework help to broaden our understanding of the dynamics of gender power, women's poverty and well-being at the micro level. Using the household as a basic unit for the extension of entitlements, Kabeer delineated six dimensions of poverty that are gender-based: food entitlements, health entitlements, personal security entitlements, labour-based

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entitlements, capital-based entitlements and household-based entitlements. Seen from a gender perspective, entitlement rules generally exhibit an asymmetry which distorts women's capability to function and affect their self-esteem and autonomy.

Kabeer's framework of analysis is useful in several ways. First, it offers a more holistic conception of women's lives and differentiates the dimensions in which gender-based injustice is articulated, and how they may be interdependent. Through the introduction of the category of personal security entitlements, Kabeer opens the space for an analysis of personal security based on gender and how the threat to such security can be derived from how women are sexually perceived by dominant groups. Second, Kabeer also offers a view on empowerment from below through greater participatory agendas and the identification of needs drawn from the experiences of grass-roots groups. Third, her framework also provides a space which recognizes organizational capability as the only resource poor women have. Thus, it bridges the gap between the possibility of claiming as laid down by the rules and the actual process of claiming as a manifestation political power.

However, similar to Sen, Kabeer also frames the ideological dimension of women's agency in the context of maximizing well-being, rather than weaving women's agency with broader processes of societal transformation for which basic ethical discussions on the role of the state, market, civil society are necessary. Without sufficient attention to these areas, the process of women's empowerment cannot avoid becoming instrumental to the goals of the state, the market and other agents in civil society rather than those of women's organizations.

To summarize, it is important to note that because the human development paradigm expressed in the capability approach signifies an important shift of reasoning in development theory and practice, women should engage themselves more actively in a constructive debate with policy-makers, and negotiate over the conceptual and policy issues that affect them directly. To date, the theoretical base of capability approach is still predominated by a male-centred definition of the individual and his/her autonomy. Production and growth occupy a central position, at the expenses of the realms of reproduction, sexuality, and care. As pointed out earlier, no production system operates without a reproduction system, to continue to treat reproduction as the underbelly of production means to continue to re-enforce gender

inequality, rather than promoting change (Truong, 1996)[4]. Rather than adding gender and stir, the HD framework needs a change of mode of apprehension about human societies which provides the validation of the totality of the human experience, if it seeks to live up to its name.

IV Human Development: The Policy Framework

So far the translation of the capability approach into policy framework expressed in various policy documents show major disjunctions in so far as gender is concerned. The two documents placed under selective scrutiny here are Ul-Haq (1995) and Griffin and McKinley (1994). Both documents use Sen's terminology, but the concept of human capital, human development, and human capability are often used interchangeably. Furthermore, the policy framework proposed retains two features in Sen's work, namely: a) the omission of the domain of sexuality as a domain of power, and 2) the maintenance of the private/public distinction which conceals how gender interacts with market relations.

In the perspective advocated in the Human Development Reports, human development does not only apply to basic needs and poverty alleviation. It is not primarily a 're-investment' in the social sectors, such as health and education. Human development is concerned with a whole spectrum of human activities and aspirations -from production processes to institutional changes and policy dialogue. It stresses the need to develop human capabilities so that people can take part productively and creatively in these processes for development. The lack of human development is problematized in terms of militarization, environmental degradation and North-South discrepancies, and not just in terms of lack of investment in human capital at national level.

In the Human Development Report of 1992, the UNDP offers an extensive definition of human development. It states the following:

> 'Human development is concerned both with developing human capabilities and with using them productively. The former requires investment in people, and the latter that people contribute to GNP growth and employment .... Development of people is vital, but it is only one part of the picture. Human development also means

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[4]reproduction in feminist literature is a very broad concept covering 1) biological reproduction, 2) maintenance of the labour force, 2) systemic reproduction or reproduction of a social system as a whole which includes ideological and cultural structures.

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development **for** the people, including the creation of economic opportunities for all. And it means development **by** the people, requiring a participatory approach. Human development encompasses all three aspects, not just one' (Human Development Report, 1992: 2).

According to this definition, HD is not just a concern of governments which provide, but also the concern of people who think, act and set priorities. People can and should be equipped to influence the trajectory of development. More than passive instruments to government policies, this definition of human development also regards people as active agents of change, the change of perceptions, attitudes and policies. It provides, at least in principle, more scope for transformation.

A closer look at the major policy guiding principles raises some concern over the scope for the transformation of gender relations. The work of Ul-Haq (1995) lays down the policy principles built around the notion of human capabilities. The objective of HD is to build human capabilities (through investment in people) and to use those capabilities fully (through an enabling framework for growth and employment). The framework is built around four main pillars: Equity, sustainability, productivity and empowerment.

According to Ul-Haq, equity should be understood as equity in opportunities, not necessary in results. What people do with their opportunity is their own concern. For women, this is a meaningless proposal since UNDP data presented in the 1995 Human Development Report show that women carry the heaviest load of work due to their double burden. Until men are also willing to share housework, equity of opportunity is likely to evaporate before its get down to the level of application. An equal distribution of resources (land and credit) on a gender basis does not guarantee that women can succeed equally with men as farmers or entrepreneurs, given their double burden. There is a process of poverty generation driven by cultural factors. Many forms of abuse against women which drive them into poverty situations are facilitated by the symbolic power men hold in society[5].

Furthermore, cultural barriers are deeply embedded at the symbolic level of gender power and cannot be removed by government decrees. Formal commitment to socialist ideology for more than half a century in Russia, Viet-nam and China which sought to remove

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[5]e.g. social circumscription against the re-marriage of widows or divorced women, social construction of 'deviancy' to impose control over same-sex unions and to deny them of opportunities and resources (Truong, 1997).

the cultural barriers to gender equality, did not manage to solve the sexual division of labour. Market liberalization rapidly re-install patriarchal structures, basing itself on the sexual division of labour which socialism did not manage to weed out (Truong, 1997; Holzner and Truong, 1997). In this regard, symbolic struggle must be seen as a necessary struggle in the battle for gender equality. It cannot be led by the state, but can be stimulated by an awakening of consciousness within the society.

The second pillar is sustainability which is defined as the sustainability of human opportunities. What must be preserved to ensure sustainability is the capacity to 'produce a similar level of well-being- even a stock of physical, human and natural capital different from what we have inherited' (Ul-Haq, 1995: 19). Here, social justice is identified as a central element to maintain social and political sustainability. Everyone should have the same access to development opportunities now and in the future. However, the concept of sustainability thus presented does not seem to take environmental concerns seriously. Many environmentalists argue that the central issue is not just a question of justice in development opportunities, but also a shift of mental disposition between human beings and nature (Braidotti, et all, 1994). Even if there were to be equal access to development opportunities (along the lines defined under equity), there is no guarantee that development is sustainable if humans continue to treat the natural world as external to their being, and that it can be consumed infinitely for human purposes.

The third principle is productivity which clearly subsumes reproduction as a socio-economic system with significant implications for women. In Ul-Haq's view, productivity requires 'investment in people and an enabling macro-economic environment for them to achieve their maximum potential' (1995: 19). East Asian countries are cited for their successful growth though their investment in education and health. Human capital is referred to as an unfortunate approach which treats people as a means of development, but which could be rescued by adding a fourth dimension which is empowerment, defined as health and education, so that people can take advantage of market opportunities. Reproduction as a socio-economic system is mentioned nowhere. It may be understood that investment in people (education and health) takes place only in relation to their productivity and not reproductivity, i.e., child-care services or other forms of supports for women do not appear to be relevant.

As pointed out earlier (Brinton, 1993; Cho and Chang, 1994; Ching, 1995), the success of the East Asian model is based on the Japanese model is grounded on a successful

management of women's labour through their life cycle. It has created many manifestations of gender inequality at the work place and in the homes. A narrow understanding of the East Asian model may lead to a parochial policy framework which can re-enforce gender hierarchies rather than ensuring gender equality.

A more explicit policy proposal for low-income developing countries has been laid down by Griffin and McKinley (1994). A selective examination of the major structural reforms proposed, such as guaranteed employment, distribution of productive assets, and economic security, show a serious gender bias. Under the guaranteed employment schemes, it is proposed that governments could guarantee employment through two avenues: a) the stimulation of small-scale and family enterprises, since it is expected that future growth will originate in the private sector, and that the private sector will be predominated by small-scale and family enterprises, and b) the formalization of employment schemes through public works projects (which were earlier confined to emergency and relief programmes) as an institutional mechanism for investment in infrastructure.

On the issue of stimulation of family enterprises and small-scale industries, data from East Asia shows that patriarchal structures are re-enforced through the sexual division of labour (Ok-Jie, 1993), female unpaid family labour, and male control over family income and skill definitions (Ching, 1993; Gallin, 1995, Truong, forthcoming). Gender inequality in small and medium enterprises appears to emanate also from the growing inter-linkages between Small-Medium-Enterprises (SMEs) into a chain of subcontracting from large firms down to the household level. In this chain, efforts to save on labour costs is built into each layer of production which translate themselves into two different wage systems and contractual norms. One for the external labour market (flexibility, irregularity) which enables firms to restructure their workforce in response to changes (e.g., market contractions, technical changes, and shift in the structure of the industry). The other one is for the labour market within firms, i.e., its core workers (professional and managerial) whose contractual norms (long-term employment, skill enhancement) are the opposite of the external labour market due to the need for intra-firm innovation. The core workers occupy the top of the apex, enjoying benefits far beyond their wage level as the norm, whereas the flexible workers

(many of whom are women)[6] occupy the lower layers of production relations, to cushion industrial and labour market contractions (Fujita, 1991).

From a gender standpoint, women's reproductive obligations would in principle lead to their allocation within the external labour market for many reasons. One is the common practice derived from the ideology of domesticity and motherhood is the social pressure on women to stop engaging in waged employment after child-bearing. Another is the common assumption that married women depends on husbands, and hence if their husbands transfer jobs women would follow. Thus, it is not in the interest of firms to incorporate women as into their core work force, unless they are single, have a dependent husband, or can transfer their reproductive obligations to others, usually other women. Thus, irrespective of the achievement in HD in terms of health and education, the ideology of domesticity and dependency may still exclude them from intra-firm mobility.

As regards the second avenue of employment schemes, i.e., public work schemes, women constitute up to 40% of the labour force in some areas (Griffin and McKinley, 1994). Attention should be paid to the nature of discrimination they face regarding division of labour and wages. The principle of mobilizing unemployed workers to transform 'idle labour' into physical capital (Griffin and McKinley, 1994: 77) and to introduce a participatory managerial strategy for the physical assets created by the unemployed workers must be examined critically from a gender standpoint. There is a gender dynamic in this process of transformation that must be taken into account. 'Idle' labour on such schemes are often female, workers and share-holders are usually men. If no mechanism exists to control this process of transformation, very likely women are likely to end up constructing the road, the irrigation project or other public work, and when the time comes for share-holding, men will use their power as men to control the assets. Ample field data indicate that there is a close correlation between violence against women and economic interests, particular within non-negotiable patriarchal structures.

On the whole the logic of human development as advocated by various policy documents displays a considerable degree of insensitivity to social and cultural sources of gender inequality, despite the endorsement of the principle of gender equality on the level

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[6]Data from Japan shows that 78.9 per cent of all part-time and flexible workers are women (Institute of Developing Economies, 1995)

of rhetoric. In this regard, a creative dialogue between HD advocates, feminist scholars and women activists is vital. Such a dialogue may be fruitful in transforming the dominant views on HD, and particularly in 'feminizing' the dominant definition of the human subject, which so far remains overtly male. Such a dialogue must be seen as an intrinsic part of the promotion of social justice. Ultimately, every process of policy making involves a process of negotiation over definitions of the substantial and the trivial and over the importance of the measured versus the unmeasured qualities of human existence. To be just, the principle of democracy endorsed by the human development paradigm must also be applicable to organized social groups, including women, to allow them to negotiate over the interpretation of the reality in which they live, and the decisions which affect their lives.

V   Conclusion

This paper has shown how the concept of human development has been forged by an interaction between mainstream thinking on development and social resistance to the practices and effects of the 'development' process (in the sense of 'modernization'). Diverse contexts of resistance produced diverse meanings of human development, which are not necessarily incompatible. On the contrary, they should be seen as diverse manifestations of the same aspiration, i.e., a re-enforcement of human agency towards a more desirable social order. Just as there can be no human development if adequate social arrangements are not present, so too can there be no human development if the role of human consciousness and its ability to supersede alienating forces is not addressed seriously.

Of all approaches to HD, the capability approach has gained more prominence than others, due to its ability to account systematically for the human side of development in macro-accounting which previous approaches failed to offer. However, it also has its own shortcomings that must be overcome. First, to date it displays a greater emphasis on material well-being at the expense of consciousness. Hence its argumentation on empowerment and agency is relatively weak. In fact, it is fair to say that HD based on the capability approach represents a progression in economic thinking, but a regression from earlier positions on human agency purported by critical theory and reformulated in feminist theory. Thus, the link between polity and economy attempted by the capability approach must be treated as being incomplete. Second, its primary unit of analysis remains the individual rather than relationships between individuals, and as such it misses out on the social and relational

perspective, i.e., the real context within which people live, cooperate or compete with each other. In this respect, it cannot be considered as entirely friendly to the dispossessed. By advocating the allocation of more resources to the dispossessed without taking into account the real context of economic globalization and the concrete power structures fixing this process, the capability approach may end up handing over the 'lambs to the wolves'[7] rather than initiating a process through which the dispossessed can gain control over their lives. Third, its empirical source of inspiration, i.e. East Asia, requires close scrutiny from a gender standpoint to provide more insights into the gender-differentiated processes underlying the achievements made by East Asian countries in economic terms. By advocating the East Asian model of modernization without an adequate incorporation of its gender critique, the capability approach can be seen as endorsing a patriarchal polity. In that sense, its rhetoric on gender equality must be treated as meaningless to women.

It is commonly agreed that the HD framework, as advocated by UNDP and the affiliated academic community, is a process yet to be completed rather than a finished product. As such, it is an open form of the expression of the desire for a new social order, a form which necessarily includes unresolved conflicts. Such conflicts are inevitable products of the different universes inhabited by those who articulate such aspirations. In this regard, the display of conflicts is an unavoidable task, which must be posed in such a way that enables alternative conceptions of HD for purposes of social transformation. By dissecting the HD debate from a historical perspective, and by identifying the differences in the various standpoints, it is hoped that the possibility for a creative dialogue on HD will be enhanced.

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[7]particularly regarding children and indigenous communities

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