

## RESEARCH NOTES

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### **Gender Inequality: Still a Critical Issue in the Development of Rural KwaZulu-Natal**

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#### **Introduction**

There is a two-way relationship between women's involvement and economic development, that is, as economic development takes place there is the likelihood that more women will become involved in economic and socio-political activities. On the other hand, women's involvement in economic and socio-political activities will enhance economic development opportunities. This paper critically examines the current economic and socio-political status of women in KwaZulu-Natal, the possible role of women in development, and policy gaps in promoting development of the region and in promoting women's role in development. It concludes that women's advancement will play a crucial role in the development of the province.

#### **Theoretical Background**

Theoretical paths in the field of women and development can be grouped into five categories: Women in Development (WID), Women and Development (WAD), and Gender and Development (GAD), Women, Environment and Sustainable Development (WED) and Development Alternatives with Women for New Era (DAWN). This section will elaborate on the basic structures of each of these approaches and offer some conceptual insights.

WID, while the oldest, is still the dominant and most popular perspective in this field. WID subscribes to the assumptions of modernisation theory. Its programmes generally stress western values and target individuals as the catalysts for social change (Visvanathan 1997:18). Modernisation theory depicts traditional societies as authoritarian and male-dominated and modern societies as democratic; thus it appears to show sensitivity to the oppression faced by women in less developed societies. Thereby, the WID calls for the full integration of women into development as workers and producers. It calls for women's inclusion into economic systems, through necessary legal and administrative changes. Strategies should be developed to minimize women's disadvantages in the productive sector. Researchers have identified five distinct WID approaches that reflect policy evolution: welfare, equity, anti-poverty,

efficiency, and empowerment approaches. WID focused exclusively on productive aspects of women's work, ignoring or minimizing the reproductive aspects of women's lives.

WAD emerged from a critique of modernisation and WID theories as an application of dependency theory. It argues that women always have been a part of development and seeks to challenge the relationships between women and the development process. The feminist-liberal proponents of WAD theories stressed the important recognition within Marxist theory of women's unpaid domestic work and reproductive services as critically important for capitalist employers.

GAD offers a holistic perspective looking at all aspects of women's lives. It questioned the basis of assigning specific gender roles to different sexes. GAD views development as a complex process involving the social, economic, political, and cultural betterment of individuals and of society itself (Young, 1997:52). It recognises women's role inside and outside the household. GAD focuses also on the social relations between women and men in the work place and other settings.

Taking women into consideration when initiating and planning development programs is a crucial issue if it is taken into account that women are closer to the environment than men (Agarwal, 1997:68). Sustainability of development depends on the sustainable use of the environment, hence women's role remains important in development. This forms the main argument of the fourth theory, WED. Women are involved in various ways with natural resources, in forestry, agriculture, energy and so on. Therefore women's role will remain important in developing strategies that produce development that meets the needs of the present generation without compromising future generations' ability to meet their's.

The latest theory/approach, DAWN, does not add much to the picture. It seems to be a combination of all other approaches. It takes a political perspective calling for a more inclusive-open approach to women's development and rejects the tendency to undervalue women's knowledge.

Participation of women whether in formal or informal employment will always play a crucial role in economic growth, as well as it supplements family income. In macroeconomic terms this will stimulate aggregate demand, via increased private consumption and investment. Most importantly, women should not be seen as passive recipients of development assistance, but be given an opportunity to take part in development.

### **Demographics of KwaZulu-Natal**

KwaZuluNatal is the third province in South Africa with a larger proportion of females than male (53.1%), following Northern Province (54%) and Eastern Cape (53.9%). This appears to be the trend for all the provinces except for Gauteng where females make only 49% of the population (SSA, 1996b: 4-5).

Less developed regions/provinces of the country have larger females population proportions; many of them live in rural areas and are African women.

More women (63%) than men (60%) live in non-urban areas in KwaZulu-Natal (SSA, 1996a). About 98% of the province's female non-urban population are African women (SSA, 1995). Seventy three percent of the Africans of the province live in non-urban areas, of whom 54% are women. Less than 8% of the population of Indians, Coloureds and Whites live in non-urban areas.

**Table 1. KwaZulu-Natal non-urban population distribution by gender, 1995 (000)**

		Total	Men	Women
Total	Number	5 392	2 501	2 890
	Percentage of the total gender population	62%	60%	63%
Africans	Number	5 293	2 446	2 847
	Percentage of the total gender population	73%	71%	75%
Indians	Number	47	24	23
	Percentage of the total gender population	6%	6%	6%
Coloureds	Number	5	3	2
	Percentage of the total gender population	5%	6%	4%
Whites	Number	46	29	18
	Percentage of the total gender population	8%	9%	6%

Source: SSA, 1996a

### **The Economic Dimension**

Economic activities in KwaZulu-Natal are centred on the Durban-Pinetown metropolis and Pietermaritzburg, with some significant concentration in the lower Umfolozi area (Richards Bay/Empangeni), Klip River district (Ladysmith-Mnambithi) and the Newcastle-Madadeni region (KwaZulu-Natal Marketing Initiative, 1996: 2). These activities tend to be controlled and performed mainly by men in urban areas, women having a minimal/negligible role to play.

The female unemployment rate (using the strict definition of unemployment) in 1995 was about 40% compared to 26% for men in the province (SSA, 1998). Employment is skewed against females, especially females living in non-urban areas and African females.

In KwaZulu-Natal about 43% of the total non-urban economically active population (EAP) are unemployed, 60% of whom are women. About 53% of the total non-urban economically active women in the province are unemployed, 99,7% of whom are African women. Unemployment distribution in the province is not only gender biased but is also racially biased. About 45% of the total non-urban economically active Africans in the province are unemployed; Whites and coloureds having a less than 1% non-urban unemployment rate, and only about 1% for non-urban Indians.

**Table 2. KwaZulu-Natal non-urban unemployment<sup>1</sup> by gender and race, 1995 (000)**

		Total	Men	Women
Total	Number	561	226	335
	Percentage of the total gender population	43%	34%	53%
Africans	Number	558	224	334
	Percentage of the total gender population	45%	36%	53%
Indians	Number	1	1	1
	Percentage of the total gender population	8%	4%	17%
Coloureds	Number	1	1	1
	Percentage of the total gender population	40%	40%	39%
Whites	Number	1	0	0
	Percentage of the total gender population	1%	1%	3%

Source: SSA, 1996a

The non-urban male-unemployment rate was only 34% in 1995 (SSA, 1996a). The distribution of women's unemployment is similar to that of the racial groups.

## The Political Dimension

There is not only a need to stimulate economic growth, employment and income levels that is required for long-term sustainability, but there are also social and institutional factors that need to be addressed. Development in KwaZulu-Natal also has been hamstrung by the high rate of violence. The people that are most affected are poor rural communities, such as South Coast (e.g. Shobashobane, Matshisini, Margate, Mbumbulu, etc.), Natal Midlands and Northern Region (e.g. Richmond, Trustfeed, Embali and other places surrounding Pietermaritzburg) which at various stages were so-called *No-go-areas*, due to the high rate of violence. Hence, the organisation of such communities for their own development poses a major challenge.

## Social Dimension

A discussion of the social dimension forms a part of the broad picture of rural development, in which women should be given fair consideration. This will cover issues of poverty and provision of basic social services in the province. The provision of basic needs services in KwaZulu-Natal not only appears to be inadequate but is also very skewed in favour of the small proportion of the total population living in urban areas with the main sufferers being rural women and youth.

KwaZulu-Natal is rated the fourth poorest province after the Northern Province, Eastern Cape, and Mpumalanga<sup>2</sup>. Poverty figures for KwaZulu-Natal indicate that almost 63% of the population live in poverty, compared to 57% for South Africa (WEFA, 1999). Most of the poverty-stricken population are Africans in non-urban areas, which include rural and peri-urban areas. Women carry a heavier burden of poverty since they are the ones mainly responsible for house-keeping services for their families.

Although rural KwaZulu-Natal lacks the provision of a number of basic social services the focus of this paper is on education as the most important social need for women's development, since it impacts simultaneously all other social services. This does not undermine the importance of provision of other basic social services, like energy and electricity, telecommunication, health, water and sanitation, social security and welfare, and transport and roads, as highlighted in the RDP (ANC, 1994:31-52).

According to SSA (1998), there is insufficient provision of energy and electricity in KwaZulu-Natal, and about 53% of households that use wood as an energy source travel more than a kilometre to fetch it. Thus, these households spend a large proportion of their time in search of wood. As regard to telecommunications only 29% of households in KwaZulu-Natal have a telephone inside the dwelling<sup>3</sup>. About 32% of the households in KwaZulu-Natal have no access to a telephone service at all. As regard to health services 66% of the households in non-urban KwaZulu-Natal travel at least five kilometers to reach

the nearest medical service centre (SSA, 1998). Studies show that in most less developed countries a significant proportion of rural households have no access to quality health-care services at times of serious illness/injury (World Bank, 1994:17). As regard to water and sanitation, 19% and 74% of KwaZulu-Natal's urban and rural population, respectively, do not have an adequate water supply. About 40% and 94% of KwaZulu-Natal's urban and rural population, respectively, do not have adequate sanitation facilities (KwaZulu-Natal Provincial Alliance RDP Committee, 1994:3). As regard to social security and welfare in rural KwaZulu-Natal there are insufficient professional social workers servicing townships and rural communities, inadequate funding, extreme poverty, insufficient state subsidies, children's homes and state-subsidised day-care facilities, unequal access to pensions by the black community and inadequate provision of old-age homes, child abuse and child neglect, drug addiction and trafficking, and violence on women (within and out of marriage). As regard to transportation facilities, most of the rural access roads are heavily eroded in places, slippery and prone to flood damage. In general, there is limited access to certain areas, especially for emergency police, ambulance and delivery vehicles (May, 1994:19). The lack of these basic social services causes bottlenecks in the development of the province.

The level and nature of education has profound effects on the development of the economy and society. It improves human potential, with positive spillover effects for social and economic development. The fragmented, unequal and undemocratic nature of education and training systems in the past have had unfavourable effects in all parts of South Africa (ANC, 1994:58). In general, the levels of education amongst the total population in KwaZulu-Natal are very low. Only 7% of the total female population (9% of males) in the province have higher education. About 18% of females (12% of males) do not have any form of education. Only 13% of African women have gone as far as Grade 12, and only 5% have gone beyond that level (SSA, 1998).

**Table 3. Education level of KwaZulu-Natal residents aged 20 and older (percent)**

Level	Male	Female
Higher	9	7
Std 10	21	18
Std 6-9	37	31
Std 4-5	10	12
Std 3	11	14
None	12	18

Source: SSA, 1998

Women in KwaZulu-Natal have less education than men. These statistics have serious implications for women living in rural KwaZulu-Natal, since they not only have insufficient educational facilities, but their education is also inferior. Further, the provision of basic social services in the province appears not only to be gender biased, but there is also racial and urban bias.

### **The Ecological Dimension**

Ecologically, KwaZulu-Natal faces three major environmental issues, as is the case for the whole South Africa. In the first place the country is experiencing a deterioration of environment. Not only is soil erosion being experienced, but also coal-burning power stations have made KwaZulu-Natal one of the most polluted areas in the world (Ngobese and Cock, 1995:21). Secondly, KwaZulu-Natal has inadequate policies for environmental protection. The enforcement of environmental control measures is minimal, and also such control measures are extremely fragmented and under-resourced. Thirdly, current environmental measures lack mass support. This is because past ideas mainly identified overpopulation as the main factor responsible for deterioration of the environment and many conservation projects disregarded human needs, rights and dignity. 'For instance the establishment of many game reserves meant forced removal and social dislocation of the local people', Ngobese and Cock (1995:17). While the women and youth are the ones most likely to be affected, the traditional system does not fully recognize their role in decision-making forums and bodies. The decisions about environment are mainly decided and shaped by men, especial in rural traditional authorities.

### **Current Initiatives and Recommendations**

Unlike in the past, the current government has indicated that rural development will be a major focus area in almost all development initiatives.

#### ***a. Current initiatives***

As regards the economic dimension KwaZulu-Natal has initiated and implemented various programmes, e.g. the Community-Based Public Works Programme (CBPWP), promotion of small-scale, micro and medium enterprises (SMMEs), and Affirmative Action. These programmes strive to speed up short-term service delivery especially in rural areas where there is a lack of institutional capacity and poverty. Amongst other things, they were intended to increase the role of women and youth in various capacity-building, training programmes and other economic activities (Province of KwaZulu-Natal Department of Works, 1997:2).

As regards the political dimension, through various forums and meetings the province has tried to address the problem of political conflict and violence in

the province. Leaders of various political parties in the province have on several occasions signed peace agreements.

As regards the social dimension, the RDP is the first national development strategy of the ANC-led government. One of the main objectives of the RDP was to meet the basic needs for all the citizens of the country (ANC, 1994:3). According to the RDP, living standards of the poor must be improved and the basic needs of all citizens must be satisfied. Thus, the focus of the RDP is to a large extent on rural development. This has the potential to bring economic, social and political stability to KwaZulu-Natal.

### ***b. Recommendations and policy options***

Many developmental-organizations have included gender issues in their agendas. For example, in March 1996 the United State Agency for International Development (USAID) adopted the Gender Plan of Action, which is a policy document set to (three main goals) to build commitment to consider gender issues as key development issues, to build capacity (or capability) to address gender in all Agency programs, and to build incentives for consideration of gender issues (USAID, 1999: 3-4).

Corner (2000) notes that women contribute to the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) economies as workers in employment and the informal sector, as entrepreneurs and investors in business, and through their unpaid work. Women's participation in the labour force has been increasing and as from the 1980s they have been providing the large part of the new labour supply in both industrialized and developing economies, having provided about 80% in some APEC economies. Women-led businesses have been found to account for 23% to 36% of all businesses, and are expanding more rapidly than the business sector as a whole. Women's contribution becomes even larger when one considers that women in the labour force continue to be disadvantaged by gender stereotypes. Their restricted mobility and lack of access to credit, technology and information clearly limits women's productivity.

The circumstances and problems experienced by the women living in rural KwaZulu-Natal demand urgent attention in the form of policy and development action. A rural development strategy should seek out opportunities which will serve the interests of all stakeholders (including women and youth organisations). Without their joint commitment, the development effort cannot succeed. There is an urgent need for a well co-ordinated and integrated approach towards addressing rural problems and unlocking the development potentials of rural areas/regions.

On the political level the provincial government has the task of ensuring that the province is politically stable and violence free. The status of women in local government structures and decision-making structures must be improved. To achieve this the government has to involve all the concerned political parties and local communities in its policy formulation and decision-making.

The most important social need for women's development is education because it impacts simultaneously all other social services. Educating women does not only benefit them personally or individually but will also produce a variety of benefits for the whole society. These include increased economic productivity, improvements in health, delayed age of marriage, lower fertility, increased political participation, and generally more effective investments in the next generation. Education is an investment that stays with a woman throughout her life, is hers to use as she wishes, and cannot be taken away (Population Council; 2000). It is evident in Asian countries that there is a direct positive link between investment in primary education and rapid economic growth and poverty alleviation. Policy alternatives of getting girls to school could include: reducing direct costs (e.g. giving subsidies), reducing opportunity costs (e.g. introducing flexible school times), addressing safety and modesty concerns (e.g. bring schools near to girls villages) and changing families perceptions of investments (Population Council; 2000). On the part of government, policy alternatives could include: relocating resources within the education sector, expansion of the existing school system, and expanding overall resources on girls' education.

## Conclusion

Rural KwaZulu-Natal women face a number of underdevelopment issues including a high level of unemployment, high poverty rate, low educational qualifications, inadequate provision of basic needs services and are limited in most decision and policy-making structures.

The study confirms that women advancement (through stimulation of the economic, social, political, and environmental dimensions of development) will play a crucial role in the future development of less developed regions or countries, in general. Amongst other things, advancing women will: reduce gender inequality, improve the lives of the people living in rural areas (especially women and youth), provide markets for both local factor inputs and locally produced goods and services, redistribute national income not only between rich and poor but also between men and women, reverse rural-urban migration by providing employment opportunities in the rural areas, and in general stimulate the rural economy. This will depend on the appropriateness and timing of local and national government policy-actions.

## Notes

1. Using the strict definition of unemployment.
2. Arranged in ascending order of their poverty figures.
3. Telephones are mainly available to whites (81%).

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