

The World Bank grapples with gender inequality: Neoliberalism with a feminist face?

Meryl J Williams

Thinking Beyond the Framework of Gender and Fisheries

6th Global Symposium on Gender in Aquaculture and Fisheries

The present

- Applied gender and fisheries researchers want to make a positive difference for women
 - Focus on local and endogenous constraints and opportunities - “Development” approach
 - Understand the current, past and potential future economic and aspirational activities of women, and how to help, e.g., secure women’s access to fish, encourage entrepreneurs
 - Focus on entry level and local conditions, tending to ignore larger forces within and outside fisheries
- At the “big end” of the development “town, what has the World Bank been thinking and doing on gender and development?

A recent feminist economics paper takes a look at the Bank

- **Neoliberalism with a feminist face: Crafting a new hegemony at the World Bank** (Elisabeth Pruegl 2016, *Feminist Economics*)

Feminist
Economics

Volume Six, Number One | March 2000



Engendering DEVELOPMENT

Through Gender Equality in
Rights, Resources, and Voice

Neoliberalism with a feminist face

“For many years, feminists have observed a tendency for commitments to gender equality to “evaporate” in development bureaucracies.”

- WB seems to have 2 views of women: strategic entrepreneurs or marginalised and vulnerable
- Traces WB’s struggle from 2001 *“Engendering Development”* report, to current position.
 - Textual, document and analysis of 34 WB policy docs and reports
 - Pruegl argues that *“the focus on gender equality in the Bank constitutes an attempt at establishing a new consensus over the regulation of the economy...neoliberalism that carries a feminist face.”* – openings for feminist agendas
 - Vs other critiques of IMF, etc as *neoliberalisation of feminism*
 - At the crux of the debate is the theorizing of the relationship between gender equality, equity and economic growth



Neoliberalism with a feminist face

“For many years, feminists have observed a tendency for commitments to gender equality to “evaporate” in development bureaucracies.”

- WB seems to have 2 views of women: strategic entrepreneurs or marginalised and vulnerable
- Traces WB’s struggle from 2001 *“Engendering Development”* report, to current position.
 - Textual, document and analysis of 34 WB policy docs and reports
 - Pruegl argues that *“the focus on gender equality in the Bank constitutes an attempt at establishing a new consensus over the regulation of the economy...neoliberalism that carries a feminist face.”* – openings for feminist agendas
 - Vs other critiques of IMF, etc as *neoliberalisation of feminism*
 - At the crux of the debate is the theorizing of the relationship between gender equality, equity and economic growth

Neoliberalism with a feminist face

- 2007-08, WB spent \$4.2m to build the business case for a positive connection between gender equality and economic growth
- *“establishing an empirical relationship between gender equality and poverty reduction and growth at the macro level has proven to be . . . challenging”* – evidence points in multiple directions
 - Ec growth vs gender equality study results: Win-win, win-lose, in between
- So macro-ec level studies didn't work, research went down to micro-level, but also looked at institutions – markets have failed women – change women or change the markets and other institutions, such as patriarchy in the family that inhibits women's success in markets?
 - Institutions focus opens up space for problematising the gendered organisation of society

Neoliberalism with a feminist face

- *“The market remains the pivotal organizing logic..... It demands the creation of laws and institutions that unburden women from family responsibilities, free them from relationships of dependency, and allow them to sell their labor power and move around freely. The Bank’s promise is that the liberation of women from the shackles of the patriarchal family will make it possible for markets to work for women, allowing them to take opportunities and thus achieve equality.”*
- Women unequal because of
 - different endowments; overcome these thru interventions to allow women to compete [Supaporn’s Earth Net Foundation, Ram’s Myanmar projects]
 - Lacking equal rights; enhance women’s voice, agency and negotiating power
- Overcome these inequalities so that women can compete in markets equitably
 - [Our papers often talk about markets and the economy as absolutes, rather than human institutions that can be transformed, e.g., low prices women receive in wages, fish price taken as financial facts, rather than as constructed institutional factors]

Neoliberalism with a feminist face

- *...”to achieve equitable markets, ... necessary to eliminate biases in institutions – including...the modernization of cultural norms and of the institutions of the family. In addition... imperative to invest in women’s human capital, and to empower them economically and politically. Such investment is justified because of the pay-offs it produces in terms of economic growth and income. From a feminist perspective, this modified kind of neoliberalism **produces substantial openings**, bringing into view **coercively gendered institutions traditionally considered private, such as those regulating relations in the family and provisions of care.**” –*
 - does away with the actors as “**abstract actors and forces**,” but rather sees them as “**embodied, rights bearing subjects**”
 - Susana’s Costa Rica paper on the cockle harvesters; Dr Noi’s social media marketing
 - Importance of identity and identity formation
 - ASC, OHS, - certification for markets, regulatory criteria, adherence to standards

So what?

- Fisheries (and aquaculture) are certainly about markets (FVC approaches bring in the women)
- And we want markets (fish, labor, etc) to work for women too
- Some resonance with practical project work we've heard in GAF6
- Keep developing the **why's** in our enquiries...
-(please discuss)

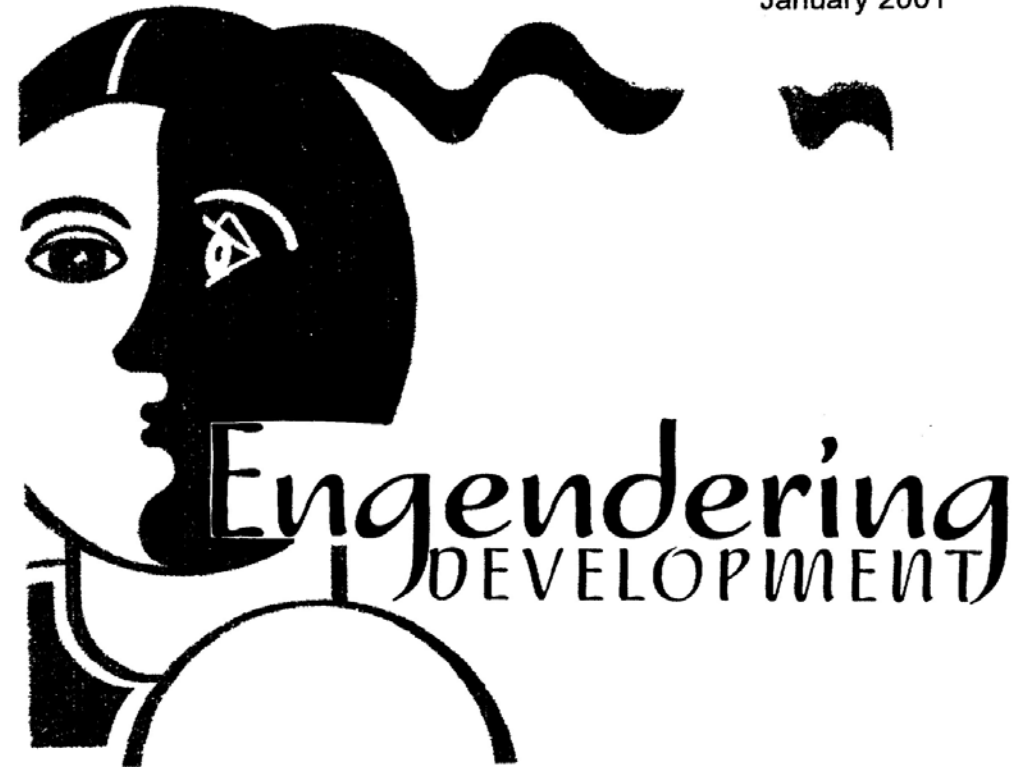
Public Disclosure Authorized



A WORLD BANK POLICY RESEARCH REPORT

21776

January 2001



*Through Gender Equality in
Rights, Resources, and Voice*

Public Disclosure Authorized

Women's Labor Force Participation in the Salmon Industry in Chiloé, Chile (Ramirez & Ruben, 2014)

- Traces salmon industry development from 1990s
- Women's participation
 - 1996: lower than national average rate (26.6% in Chiloé vs 36.6% nationally)
 - 2009: a higher than national average in (48% vs 43%).
- Which women went to work in salmon industry?
 - if husbands previously migrated seasonally for several months, leaving them to do productive "men's work," e.g., farming, plus reproductive work, were more likely to take up paid work than other women.
 - if previous productive work was more seen as "women's work," e.g., shellfish and seaweed harvesting, crafts, were less likely to take up the new paid work.
- Still a gender pay gap, after adjusting for types of work by women and men
- **Coda:** Chile salmon industry recently hit by algal blooms, heavy antibiotic use, etc, resulting in large job losses, e.g., 500 jobs in one company, Apr 2016
 - What is the gendered impact?

References

- Pruegl, E. 2016. Neoliberalism with a feminist face: Crafting a new hegemony at the World Bank. *Feminist Economics*, DOI: 10:1080/13545701.2016.1198043