

Empowerment of Women: An Analysis of Gender Training Frameworks for Open Learning Systems

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Open learning systems can challenge the conventional processes operating in curriculum design and development in order to address the need for gender training. An analysis of the existing gender training frameworks would reveal that women's practical needs for income generation can be actively promoted while at the same time recognising their strategic needs for confidence building and leadership training inputs. Gender training built around this perspective would serve both practical and strategic gender interests.

Institutional policy informs of the nature of gender training. Open learning systems can choose to adopt gender-specific or gender-transformative policies in design and development of self instructional materials and delivery mechanisms. Collaboration with user agencies such as NGOs/voluntary organizations is vital during both the development and the delivery of gender training courses and programmes. Annu J. Thomas offers some valuable insights in this paper.

Introduction

The access and the impact of open learning systems are governed by their ability to generate learner-friendly materials, learning resources and situations. Women learners could particularly benefit from open learning systems because they provide a viable alternative, reducing social opportunity costs and weakening cultural constraints (Thomas, 1995; Rathore, Singh and Dubey, 1996). At a substantive level they can also challenge conventional ways of 'thinking and doing' in curriculum design for gender training.

Gender training offers a vehicle for dissemination of the lessons learnt from past developmental policy, practice and examination of gender divisions in resources and responsibilities. An analysis of the existing gender training frameworks and a comparison of their suitability for open learning systems would help in conceptualizing empowerment of women through self-instructional materials.

Kabeer (1992) outlined three different gender training frameworks existing in development agencies. These are the Gender Roles Framework (GRF), Triple Roles Framework (TRF), and Social Relations Analysis (SRA). This article seeks to analyze and compare them in the context of open learning systems which are key development agencies in themselves.

Gender Training Frameworks

The theoretical rationale for gender training is rooted in the analysis of scholars such as Molyneux (1985) and Moser (1989). Molyneux first outlined the concepts of strategic and practical gender interests. Strategic interests emerged from an analysis of women's subordination and laid out possibilities for an alternative, more satisfactory set of arrangements than those already existing. On the other hand, Molyneux described practical gender interests as emerging from the concrete conditions of women's positioning within the gender division of labour.

Moser explored the dichotomy between gender interests and needs. She interpreted interests as 'prioritized concerns', and needs as 'the means, by which concerns may be satisfied'. Moser suggested that by identifying different gender interests, it is possible to translate them into planning and training needs; in other words, the means by which gender concerns may be satisfied.

It is significant to explore the emphasis on 'gender interests' rather than 'women's interests'. A recognition of difference—not just between women and men, but also within the categories of women and men makes the concept of 'women's interests' highly contentious. 'Because women are positioned within their societies through a variety of different means—class, ethnicity and gender. The interests they have as a group are similarly shaped in complex and sometimes conflicting ways. This is the reason why Molyneux suggests that the concept of gender interests be reserved for those that 'women (or men for that matter) may develop by virtue of their social positioning through gender attributes.'

The gender training frameworks under discussion offer different routes into the question of gender needs and priorities.

The Gender Roles Framework (GRF)

This framework sees the route to gender equity through economic efficiency. The aim of the GRF is to draw attention to who does what, who gains access to development resources and who benefits. However, it stops short of challenging structural inequalities in production, distribution and consumption.

For the gender trainer working through an open learning system, the GRF offers little transformatory potential. It would, on the other hand, suggest that training inputs be provided to women already in the economic workplace—in the public domain. In most parts of India women have important productive roles but these remain in the private domain and do not 'fit' in common definitions of production.

Using the GRF would also obviate the need for conscientization and confidence building as part of the training process. It would subscribe to specifically training women for project orientations without encouraging them to examine their own roles, relationships and networks in the context of the broader community dynamics

and cultural values. It is only from a process such as this that women can strive to understand themselves and strive for empowerment.

The Triple Roles Framework (TRF)

Women play three major roles—reproductive, productive and community management. TRF looks at the practical needs that emerge from women's triple roles. Practical gender needs are seen as arising out of the multiple responsibilities assigned to women by the gender division of labour—food provision, family health, child care, income generation and community management of resources and basic services. It needs to be emphasized that meeting needs arising out of any one role may impinge on other roles.

According to Kabeer (1992), the 'TRF offers a gender planning methodology which addresses women's needs, as distinct from the GRF which aims at merely 'grafting gender onto existing planning methods'. However, neither framework seeks to locate the problem in the process of planning and training itself as a site of gender politics.

From the standpoint of open learning systems, the discourse of needs outlined in the TRF remains what Tendler calls 'an enlightened top-down approach' (1982). However, the TRF may provide a useful framework for responding to women's immediate felt needs. The fact that women may have a longer-term strategic interest in transforming their status does not mean that these interests are transparent to them in the way needs emerging from daily routines and responsibilities might be. Satisfying immediate practical needs, therefore, cannot be ignored.

Social Relations Analysis (SRA)

Retaining both needs and interests as distinctive elements of a social relations analysis helps to carve out an autonomous space for women in the planning and training process where they are perceived as active agents of change rather than as beneficiaries alone. SRA reminds us that there are goals for which empowerment of women is an essential prerequisite (Sen and Grown, 1985; Elson, 1991).

In order to attain empowerment, women need to break free from space, resource and time constraints. Practical needs, and the ways in which they are met, thus, become interrelated dimensions of strategic interests. Needs point in the direction of satisfying choices while interests refer to expanding control over the interpretation of needs and the conditions of choice.

Open learning systems could play a useful role employing this framework. They can help to shape the delivery of educational and training inputs to meet women's practical needs in ways which have transformatory potential (Young, 1986).

The need for income generation, for example, is a felt need for poor women. However, women's low social capital (education, status, bargaining power, experience

of the political and economic world, self-confidence), their heavy workload and their triple role — all have serious repercussions on the viability of women's economic enterprises.

The process of promoting empowerment of women through economic enterprises is a complex one. Indicators for women's empowerment within economic enterprises (OXFAM, 1990) need to be actively addressed during curriculum design and development of training materials for gender trainers.

Gender trainers, through appropriately designed training materials, can reflect on whether the economic enterprises they plan:

- promote changes in the sexual division of labour in the public and/or private spheres;
- support the development of skills aimed at enhancing women's productive capability;
- establish women's rights to training and education;
- generate awareness among the women and the community about gender inequalities;
- strengthen local, regional or national women's organizations and networking initiatives at different levels and/or between women of different sectors;
- promote women's control in the management of the enterprise and marketing of end products,
- provide access to new credit and financing opportunities for the women;
- help women control and own cash and the means of production;
- promote the development of leadership skills amongst women;
- promote recognition of women's contribution to the economy and the community.

Social relations analysis could provide gender trainers with the frame work for establishing and using these indicators. Impact can be on all or several of these criteria and processes are seen to be as important as outcomes. The indicators suggest how self-instructional materials could be developed for gender trainers incorporating elements of confidence building conscientization and leadership training. These are vital in converting income generation programmes (IGPs) serving practical needs into programmes which are more holistic and which also address strategic needs.

Experiences drawn from India, Philippines, Cambodia, Vietnam and Indonesia have shown that it is those projects that do integrate consciousness-raising into the group activities that make a greater contribution to women's empowerment (OXFAM, 1990; ILO 1993).

IGPs are frequently adopted by NGOs as the main entry point for their women's development programmes. However, there are numerous other entry points which

could be adopted by gender trainers in NGOs such as projects centered around community-based nutrition and health care, literacy and informal education, creches, water collection and improved agricultural techniques. These may also address women's perceived needs in a strategic manner.

Social relations analysis could also be applied in developing a social audit of educational interventions designed by open learning systems in a manner similar to social audits developed for community interventions (Jahan, 1989). Kabeer (1992) suggests the following social audit for all interventions with human resource, and therefore, gender implications.

1. Who is being targeted by the proposed policy/programme/project and what assumptions are being made about them? What evidence is there that these assumptions are well informed?
2. Who devised the goals of the intervention? Are these goals shared equally by women and men? If not, are there reasons for supporting the intervention on the grounds that it would enhance gender equity?
3. Whose interests are being promoted through the intervention? Are additional resources being provided where additional responsibilities are entailed?

Implications of Gender Training Frameworks in Designing Self-Instructional Materials for Women's Empowerment

A social audit of educational and training interventions leads to an examination of specific gender-sensitive interventions that could shape the process of curriculum design and course development. These should include: gender needs assessment; identification of gender assumptions in policy and planning; developmental testing; information dissemination; generation of skill development and conscientization inputs; creation of appropriate support systems for women learners (Thomas, 1995).

The strength of an open university is that the resource base which actually develops the curriculum and prepares the course material can be varied according to the specific needs and objectives. NGOs are major actors in gender training. This would logically lead to the conclusion that there is a *need for collaboration and partnership with these 'user agencies' in need assessment, course development and delivery.*

Some salient features need to be considered while exploring possibilities of collaboration with NGOs and networking. Three types of NGOs (Fowler, 1988) are engaged in microdevelopment initiatives in India—membership organizations (MOs); private service organizations (PSOs) and donor local organizations. MOs are set up by members themselves for their own benefit and are controlled by them. These local organizations frequently emphasize voluntary membership and internal

accountability. Examples of such organizations are women's groups (*Mahila mandals*), cooperatives, traditional self help groups.

The second type of NGO designated as a private service organization (PSO) aims to promote the development of MOs and whoever else have been chosen as the intended beneficiaries of their activities e.g. women entrepreneurs.

The third type of NGO is the Indian branch of a foreign NGO also called a donor local organization.

Open universities may find it useful to approach:

- PSOs in order to reach out to the MOs with whom they interact
(Expected outcome: preparation of self-instructional case study material and training materials documenting real life experiences with gender training)
- reputed MOs with long standing experience directly
(Expected outcome: preparation of self-instructional case study material and training manuals documenting real life experiences with gender training)
- donor local organizations for their experiences with MOs/PSOs and sponsorship for learners/learner groups with relevant experience.

In addition to collaboration with user agencies, open learning institutions also need to examine their policy underpinnings for course development. Applying the classification of Kabeer (1995), open universities can adopt policy stances which are gender-neutral, gender-specific or gender redistributive/transformational. Gender-neutral policies do not challenge existing divisions of learning resources and responsibilities. Gender-specific policies favour targeting activities and learning resources which women are likely to control or benefit from. These may also leave the existing division of resources and responsibilities intact.

On the other hand, gender-redistributive/transformational policies seek to actively change existing gender relations through more even distribution of learning resources and responsibilities.

These policy stances would also lead to differences in the way self-instructional training material is designed and developed. A gender-neutral policy, for example, would lead to training materials which are predominantly instructional. Gender-transformational or gender-specific (in some cases) policies would lead to training materials which serve both conscientization and instructional objectives.

Open learning systems offer interesting possibilities for gender transformational policy because by their very nature, educational and training inputs are available to both men and women. Training materials can, therefore, become effective vehicles to combat gender relativism as defined by Khullar (1991). Both women and men could be encouraged to critically reflect on unequal domains of knowledge acquisition as well as the reinforcement of traditionally given gender distinctions. In the process of training men to become gender trainers, their own deeply embedded

beliefs and attitudes could undergo change. This would take us closer to the vision of equal partnership (Gore, 1988).

There is considerable scope for open learning institutions to promote this equal partnership through recognition of women's skills and through promoting the development of skills which could result in combating job segregation. Trainers responsible for designing and implementing economic enterprises for women are a vital target group. Through suitable training of trainers packages, trainers could be encouraged to reflect and make detailed observations on the following key questions at four stages: need assessment, project design, project implementation and evaluation. The key questions at each stage as proposed by Piza and Francisco (1990) are:

Stage 1: Need Assessment

Was socio-economic baseline data collected reflecting existing and desired skills of women in production, their workload, social and environmental milieu and existence of support systems within and outside the community?

Stage 2: Project Design

How does the project address women's needs, anticipated benefits, issues related to women's participation in decision making and control over resources and processes, needs for building support networks and systems and preparing community members?

Stage 3: Project Implementation

How does the project shape quality of women's participation and leadership in ownership, management, production, marketing and finance?

Are there any unanticipated factors of development affecting women and have they necessitated changes in the project design?

Stage 4: Evaluation

What was the net gain from the project in terms of addressing women's practical and strategic economic needs?

What has the project achieved and what problems is it encountering to become a self-reliant and/or a viable economic enterprise?

The key questions just mentioned give a useful insight into critical issues in the design of relevant self-instructional material for trainers on promotion of women's economic enterprises meeting both practical and strategic needs.

Providing women with the support to attain greater access and control over the learning process addresses strategic interests. Major restructuring of delivery mechanisms could make it possible for women learners to watch or listen to simulated training sessions conducted by master trainers based in local NGOs or voluntary organizations. This could be achieved through multimedia inputs at suitable

study centres or programme centres. Rathore, Singh and Dubey (1996) have suggested that a problem area for women distance learners is getting requisite tutorial and counselling help. This points to the need for appropriate counselling inputs in terms of face-to-face contact sessions with experienced gender trainers at the local level as well as suitable multimedia inputs for simulation and skill development.

Conclusion

The major points that emerge from this article include:

- Meeting women's felt or perceived practical needs as well as strategic needs should be the major objective of developing self-instructional material for women's, development and empowerment.
- Gender training offers a vehicle for dissemination of the lessons learnt from past development policy and practice and examination of gender divisions in resources and responsibilities.
- The three different gender training frameworks existing in development agencies include: The Gender Roles Framework, Triple Roles Framework and Social Relations Analysis. Of these, the Social Relations Analysis offers opportunities to shape the delivery of educational and training inputs to meet women's practical needs in ways which have transformatory potential. This framework could also be applied in developing a social audit of educational interventions designed by open learning systems.
- Open learning institutions may find it useful to explore possibilities of collaboration with NGOs for course design, development and delivery.
- Adoption of gender transformative policies by open learning institutions can lead to training materials which become effective vehicles to combat gender relativism and bring us closer to the vision of equal partnership
- Promotion of entrepreneurship is a key objective for many gender trainers. However this should not be limited to earning an income but also addressing strategic needs linked to confidence building, conscientization and leadership training.
- The issue of providing women with the support to attain greater access and control over the learning process addresses strategic interests. This needs restructuring of delivery mechanisms.

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