9   CASE STUDY: GENDER PROJECTS

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Introduction

I am going to begin with the following case. UNRWA gave money for a widow to open a sewing factory. Later on, this factory was closed and the project failed. What was the reason for this failure?

The causes might be to do with technical issues, for example perhaps this woman has no skills or no ability to run a sewing factory, or there is no feasibility study, or a lack of good estimation about the requirements for implementing the project. Another reason might be the social factor and 'self factor', that is to say a lack of self-confidence. This factor leads us to the importance of integrating an awareness of gender issues in any project. There may be misunderstanding concerning the project, which is focused on women, because, for example, opponents might contend that it takes ladies 'away from society' and keeps them away from the traditional community.

Following this angle leads me to another example: PECDAR presented a project for supposedly building Palestinian infrastructure, and yet all this investment and energy went to men. When you want to speak about unemployment, you should not consider men only, while there are a lot of women who are also unemployed. At best, what we see is that they will operate a small project, for example; distributing sewing machines, or a factory that can integrate women, but which does not lead to real development. This is like putting one group in a train to take them to a specific place, while sending others to the same place using bicycles. Neither group will necessary reach the same place. And if the second group reaches the right destination it is going to be at a point when they are already exhausted and they will thus lose the ability to continue in a healthy and normal way in the development process.

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This is how development projects in Palestine go, including some under the auspices of NGOs, not only those having to do with agriculture but also those that have to do with policy making. For example, the Agriculture Ministry currently works on a project to increase the wheat production in the northern districts and they claim that they take into account the women by sending and distributing plants and some small loans in order to let the women work in their gardens. In this way, they are not going to improve the status of women and they are not going to increase the wheat production. So why are they doing it?

In general both men and women work in agriculture. Men, though, hold more than ¾ of the senior or supervisory positions. So when they go to the fields to supervise or train on how to plant new plants, they usually go to the men. The same thing applies when they start to use new machines, for example; tractors in planting the wheat, for plowing, harvest or for irrigation, they think predominantly about the men. This means that in order to increase the wheat production in the northern areas, all they did was further exclude women from agriculture. The community, in accordance with its nature, includes both men and women in agricultural production. When the modern planner, who is sitting in a nice office, wants to modernize things in a way that goes against this nature, problems arise.

Any industry or new technology, which comes into a community faces that community's own values, traditions, habits and views on who is expected to do what etc. Technology does not implement itself; technology is implemented by humans who have complex inter-relationships. Consequently integrating technology always affects human relationships.
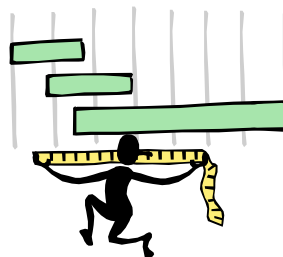
Some might say that increasing wheat production is a technical issue only and whatever effect this might on social life is another issue, or has to be studied separately. Another might say that it is not possible to bring women who have no idea about mechanics to work on a machine and begin from A, B C; it is easier to involve men. Another point of view acknowledges that when there is an objective for a project, it has to be done aside from the gender issue, especially if it that is not its direct objective. Finally it is worth mentioning that if women limit *themselves* in a specific work, it is their problem. It cannot be said, for example, that while trying to promote women and not to exclude them, we don't want to use a certain machine.

Differences between development and improvement

People say that technology has its effect, and naturally there are bound to be victims. First of all let us stress that there is a difference between development and economic growth.

The period from 1967 till 1973 was a period of great economic growth in Palestine. This had an effect on workers, on what they ate, how they behaved and what their interests became. Suddenly workers built their own houses, bought cars and they became richer than the teachers for example. The financial growth reached 18%. The improvement in China, in comparison, is 9-10%. In Gaza growth reached an annual level of more than 18%.

The period from 1973-1977 was termed one of stagnation in economic growth. 1977 saw the implementation of Israel's "iron fist" policy and as a result of an Israeli economic crisis all the earlier economic improvements began to reverse, reaching −3% annual growth in 1986. It can be said that because of this the Intifada began in 1987, and not in 1969 or 1971. Actually, the Intifada neither depended on the students, teachers or the educated. It was rooted in the workers who used to work in Israel. This was symptomatic and indicative of a very important thing, which is that during the preceding time, we had witnessed serious economic growth, but we had had no development.

Development is more comprehensive than economic growth. Palestinian economic improvement depends on Israeli economic improvement. We, as Palestinians, play a cushion role. When they have a boom it expands so more Palestinian workers find jobs in Israel, when there is a crisis, we (or the Palestinian workers in Israel) are the first who are fired. This is not development. The workers may be individually living reasonably well, while the roads are very bad, the health care non-existent, infrastructure inadequate and the educational system does not compliment the Palestinian market. During this period the developmental focus was rather on the Israeli vocational schools, which trained blacksmiths, carpenters etc. for the Israeli market, while Palestinian schools graduated people for emigration, and not for Palestinian development.

The Palestinian Authority, throughout its seven years, instead of decreasing the dependency on the Israeli economy, increased it. This

is because there were those who wanted to be agents for the Israeli economy. Here we are truly not speaking about development.

Development takes into account different factors. The most important is the human factor. Any classical style of colonialism permits capitalist accumulation. In other words there are always people who get benefits form the occupiers, as in Algeria, South Africa, etc. The same thing is found in Palestine throughout different levels of social strata, although it is limited immensely by Israel's complete control over the Palestinian market and the import and export trade. 'De-development' does pre-date, in some cases, the Israeli occupation; prior to the Israeli occupation, there was a Jordanian law, which did not permit any factory worth more than 3 million Dinars to operate in the West Bank.

There has been a long process of accumulation of weakness in our economic structure. The Israelis were very aware not to have people benefit from their program, or to allow any serious development, which might encourage people to stay. Their aim is and has been to exile the people out of the country.

What do you want to achieve from economic improvement? For what and for whom do you want to increase income? It can be likened to a Palestinian father who works for 16-17 hours a day to get income for his family. At the end he does not see his family, nor takes care of his children, and thus eventually perhaps his son becomes a drunk, and his daughter becomes a deviant because the absence of a father … hard work and economic growth must be harmonized so as to be for the community's full benefit.

For quarrying, beside Qalandia, the workers get a reasonable salary. This is one of their economic improvements. But eventually the workers develop health problems. At the age of forty or so the worker might have no job. Further, residential conditions have been affected by this quarrying. Such a case indicates the difference between development and economic improvement. Development does not necessarily mean that workers have to earn a high salary but eventually contract lung cancer. Real development should take such factors into account.

Many organizations and institutions have good intentions but policies alter them and they become bad. For example, their objective might be to improve the Third World, but the effects of their project on the people in the Third World may be negative in the end. Avoiding such an occurrence might be best achieved through fully understanding the value of human development.

In one example, farmers might be asked to plant roses instead of wheat, tomato etc. in order to earn better money. All the farmers plant roses; suddenly Israel closes the roads. What is the result? Before the "improvement", they were at least able to eat tomato, now what are they going to eat? Who is going to eat roses?

A similar thing has happened in Africa, where people were told to plant banana, so they planted banana. Soon banana became very cheap and so they neither got money as the result of the economic "improvement" nor did they have varied food from their traditional plants, which they used to plant before. There are tens of examples of such strategies and plans, which do not take into account the human as the essential base for the development.

Thinking that increasing the income of a family has a positive effect on each member of the family is wrong. This is called the "trickle down" theory, which means that you have only to give the head and everything will reach those who are beneath the head. It is not right, because the head has his own priority, which maybe differs from that of the rest. For example, if I go to a farmer and I tell him that I want to improve agricultural process, his priorities and his willingness to do so probably differ from his wife's priorities and those of his children.

Again, when you want to increase the income of a family, you have to study, in advance, what is going to happen to the family after you implement the project. In many communities, for example in Cairo, and especially in the poor areas, 35% of families depend on women. Still, many projects are designed based on making the main beneficiaries men, and while the men increase their income the family income will consequently be increased. As a result of this planning, women become poorer and more dependent and their isolation is increased.

The importance of women integration in the development process

Human development is the essence of all development. If there are developmental trends and there is a group; either children, women, widows, poor, farmers etc. suffering from negative effects, it means that the project is wrong. Whenever there are people suffering, there is a need to stop and think about that project. There must be something wrong in the project, because the aim of the project is to get people from point A to point B, so if a specific group of the community get to B, and the rest fall behind, the original problems and conflicts which might negate the whole purpose of the project will arise again. *Al-Aqsa Intifada* began not because of Sharon's visit to the Al-Aqsa compound. If

Sharon had not visited Al-Aqsa, the Intifada would still have arisen - maybe in the form of resistance directed against the PA even, because unemployment was increasing, income was not steady and money was being distributed unfairly.

Development has to accommodate the interests of different groups and be directed by moral principles and not only by economic ones. The failure of the project that was done for the widow was that the project did not address this widow as a human. What responsibilities did the widow have? What does the widow have to do to succeed in the project? If this widow has a handicapped child and is expected to go outside so as to manage the sewing project, who is going to take care of her child? The result may be that she takes her daughter out of the college. Hence the result of improving the status of the family is that the daughter cannot continue her studies.

What then if there is no training for running and managing the sewing project and there is no training for marketing? If there are a lot of imported clothes, where is this widow going to market her product? Marketing needs a national development policy harmonized with such issues of import and export.

In this project the traders might return to the widow and tell her that there is nowhere to market your product and after all that time all this family would get from the project is that the daughter loses her studies.

Abdul Nasser, who has no idea about gender issues, has a national project. He decides to depend on local production, thereby reducing his dependence on international markets, a decision, which has its own political connotations for him, especially to do with the Arab-Israel conflict. The first step he takes for this development is focusing on women, half the community. He opens kindergartens and nurseries, improves public transportation, public schools and gives maternity leave etc. If we have such a national project for development, there is no way *but* to involve women.

Bringing up children is not only women's work, for which – instead of acknowledging them – the community punishes them. To change this, husbands, the wider community and governments must work to support women.

Civil Society Empowerment