Poverty and the Empowerment of Women: Lessons from Developing Countries for the U.S.
Grand Challenges in Social Work
UC Berkeley School of Social Welfare
Michael J. Austin, PhD
Mack Professor of Nonprofit and Public Sector Management
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- Panelists
  - Dr. David Lewis
  - Dr. Lalima Srivastava
  - Siroj Sirojudin

- Grand Challenge of Poverty & Inequality
  - The U.S. and abroad
- Complexity of measuring poverty
- Looking to developing countries for lessons learned
- Inform our policy & practice discussions
- Inform our capacity to "internationalize" our curriculum
David Lewis, PhD

Professor of Social Policy & Development

Department of Social Policy
London School of Economics and Political Science
Context

• A ‘perfect storm’ of donor ‘results agenda’, increased private sector involvement, and over-professionalised NGOs?

• Squeezing the space for genuine bottom up participation?

• People seen instrumentally as consumers rather than agents in own development?
Observations from Bangladesh

- NGOs have played important roles in increasing women's access to resources through expanding small-scale income-generating activities - recasting gender relations, expanding opportunities (Feldman 2001)
- Economic and political benefits of empowerment - small but growing negotiations within local power structure (local councils, confronting violence against women, etc.) (Lewis & Hossain 2005)
- But general trend towards holistic approaches by NGOs towards narrower service delivery (Kabeer 2009)
Issues Around Transfer/Exchange

- Importance of learning across the 'parallel worlds' of domestic/international approaches and experiences

- Processes of empowerment vary across contexts and settings

- Importance of combining economic and political dimensions of empowerment
Women & Poverty in Developing Countries

Lalima Srivastava, PhD
Post-Doctoral Research Fellow

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Women in Developing Countries—patterns of oppression

- Subjugation
- Isolation
- Exploitation
Women in Mewat, India

- Patriarchy and cultural constraints
- Capability poverty (high illiteracy, early marriage, high fertility, high maternal mortality)
Poverty: Key Issues

- Illiteracy
- Inequalities
  - Gender
  - Economic
Capability Approach

The core concept is on what people are able to do and be

- Capabilities
- Functionings
- Agency
Women, Microfinance and Capability Approach

- Life and bodily health
- Affiliation
- Political and material control over one's environment
Some emerging questions...

- To what extent will involvement of men help empowerment of women?

- What simplified research methods (culturally relevant) could be used to document complex issues confronting women in the developing world?
The Stories of Women’s Anti Poverty Movements in Developing Countries

Siroj Sirojudin
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World Polity: Shaping Women’s Movement in Developing Countries

- World Polity: "world society models shape nation-state identities, structures, and behavior via worldwide cultural and associational processes."

- World Culture: models defining actors (e.g. nation-state, individual), purposes (e.g. development, progress), and principles (e.g. human rights, justice)

- The tendency of Policy/Program Isomorphism
Effects on Donors: Policy/Program Isomorphism

- WID/GAD
- Confirming UN Convention (such as CEDAW; UN Decades on Women)
- MDGs: 2 Goals for Women (3 and 5)
- Universalizing Policy: For developing countries
- Core ingredient in Loan/Donor Policies
- World Bank/IMF Lending Policy: PRSP
Effects on Developing Countries: Policy/Program Similarities

- Government and NGO
- The Creation of the "Ministry of Women Empowerment" since 1980s
- Ratifying UN CEDAW convention become national law
- Gender-Oriented Policy/Development Programs (WID/GAD)
- Practice: Welfare rights, economic rights, social rights, legal
World Polity and Structural Patriarchy

- Patriarchy as an institutionalized cultural-power relations

- Work at both household, community, national and global levels

- The Paradox Anti-poverty Programs: Addressing poverty/maintaining patriarchy
Impact on Programs Addressing Women in Poverty

- Donor-Driven Government and NGOs
  - Agenda driven by INGO or Donors
  - Accountability to donors instead of community
  - Often beyond or not in their core expertise

- Commercializing Microfinance
  - Diverting empowerment agenda

- Response: Resistance movements

- Adverse Incorporation of Women in Informal Sector
Global Inspiration-Local Innovation

- **CARD:** The Philippines

- **Inspiration:**
  - Adopt Grameen Bank Women-only Microcredit
  - Coconut pickers

- **Innovation:**
  - Transformed: Women Social development resources center
  - Microinsurance
  - Inspire similar initiatives in South East Asia
The Challenge for International Social Work

- To what extent have social work education programs and researchers addressed the roles of world polity in women empowerment?
- How do international organizations shape the policy and practice of empowering women in developing countries?
- What are the impacts of this global culture on women empowerment practice?
- What are the conditions needed for local-level initiatives to reconcile the global culture and the local context for empowering women?