

Development, Gender, and the Environment: Theoretical or Contextual Link? Toward an Institutional Analysis of Gender

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The current discourse on development, gender, and the environment has emerged from a convergence of feminist and environmentalist critiques of economic development.¹ This discourse is dominated by two paradigms: Women in Development (WID) and ecofeminism.² Although the two paradigms have been influential in advancing women's issues in economics, this influence has been limited by the lack of understanding of the institutional nature of gender among the proponents of the paradigms. This lack of recognition is due to the essentialist characterization of women that underlies both paradigms. In WID, women are treated as rational beings who readily respond to economic incentives within any cultural setting; in ecofeminism, women possess a supra-material bond with nature that endows them with a privileged understanding of the environment and an innate ability to care for it regardless of the specific institutions at work. This oversight of the institutional nature of gender obscures its economic significance, its path dependence, and its resistance to change. It also obscures power implications, thereby depriving the issue of gender of one of its most important elements.

In this paper, I propose an alternative conceptual framework for redrawing this discourse, particularly with regard to the treatment of gender. This framework is predicated on two related points: (1) Any discussion of gender or women must be firmly grounded in an institutionalist understanding of economic and social proc-

The author is Assistant Professor of Economics, Franklin and Marshall College. This paper is based on a presentation given at the Race/Gender Center Faculty Colloquy at Bucknell University, April 1995. I wish to thank all those who attended the presentation and Bucknell University for a grant that facilitated some of the research for this paper. I am also very grateful to Anne Mayhew, Janet Knoedler, Tony Maynard, and Hilbourne Watson for reading and commenting on earlier drafts.

esses. I use the term *gender specification* to refer to the social designation of individuals to a particular gender and the historically and culturally circumscribed economic and social roles contingent upon that designation. Gender specification defines the relative positions of women and men in the economy and in relation to the environment. (2) Because of the historical and cultural specificity of institutions and processes, there is no basis for a theoretical discourse on development, gender, and the environment, but only a contextual analysis of the multiple points where development, women, and the environment meet and interact. That is to say, the relationship between women and the environment can be understood only within the institutional contexts in which the two interact and in which development takes place.

So far, institutionalists have considered the convergence of institutionalist and feminist epistemologies [Waller and Jennings 1990] but not the pertinence of institutional economics itself as a conceptual framework for discussing gender.³ I argue here that institutional economics is poised to make important contributions to a substantive analysis of gender as well. This argument has significant implications not merely for development economics, but for economic analysis in general.⁴

I briefly review the WID and the ecofeminist paradigms and the relationship between women and nature that underlies this discourse. I then discuss the significance of the institutional element and develop a framework for redrawing this discourse along different lines from the present ones. I conclude with some suggestions for further research.

The Discourse on Development, Gender, and the Environment

WID and ecofeminism come from different historical and philosophical origins. They differ drastically in their conception of women and women's relationship to the environment and present almost antithetical views on economic development. Yet, the two approaches share more in common than first impressions suggest. Both categorize women as a monolithic group and universalize their experiences across class, culture, and other differentiating variables. Neither approach perceives of gender specification as an institution fundamental for understanding the economic and social conditions of women in the Third World and their relation to the environment. In this paper, the World Bank literature, particularly in the area of forestry in Sub-Saharan Africa, is taken as the leading example of the WID approach, and the work of Vandana Shiva is taken to represent the ecofeminist one.

Women in Sustainable Development

The WID approach unites neoclassical economic theory and liberal feminist thought, depicting rationality and optimizing behavior as inherent attributes of the human species; women are no different from men in that respect. Economic development is seen as the logical social outcome of that behavior; the only problem is that development has so far almost entirely by-passed women in the Third World. The United Nations' WID initiative was sparked by a recognition that women had not shared in most "gains" from economic growth: women received lower wages and held less property than men across the Third World [Boserup 1970].⁵ The WID prescription for correcting this flawed picture is to "integrate" women into the development process through their inclusion in decision making and through better documentation and re-evaluation of their work.⁶ By the late 1980s, concern with environmental quality and ecological sustainability had intensified, and this same conception was carried over without modification in a format that can be characterized as integrating women in sustainable development.

As the leading international development institution, the World Bank has been hard at work trying to achieve this integration. In 1987, the Bank launched an initiative to make "WID issues" part of its "mainstream work" [World Bank 1987b; 1988]. This was followed in 1989 by policy guidelines for "involving women in forestry projects" [Molnar and Schreiber 1989]. Since then, a number of "gender and environment" projects have been introduced by the Bank in order to raise awareness among policymakers of the links between women and the environment and to increase women's participation in sustainable development [Clones 1992].⁷ Recently, the Bank released a blueprint for a comprehensive forestry strategy in Sub-Saharan Africa that calls for expanding the role of women in development [World Bank 1994a].⁸

The Bank's approach to women and development in each of these ventures is based on a doctrine that stresses efficiency and the importance of human capital. This doctrine typically emphasizes the need to raise women's productivity as a means of raising rates of return on development projects and proclaims the cost-effectiveness of investment in women, e.g., through education and better health care [World Bank 1984; 1989b]. However, by proceeding as though women can be *imported* into preconceived structures—in this case development projects—this approach assumes that women will easily adjust their "decision matrices" to take into account new variables. This assumption, in my view, is symptomatic of the neoclassical tendency to overlook the extent to which people's behavior is shaped by entrenched institutions. Indeed, this oversight partly explains the Bank's unsatisfactory record in forestry management in Sub-Saharan Africa, where the Bank has admitted that its forestry projects have had little impact on the rate of deforestation [World Bank 1994a]. Some of the reasons for this outcome, according to the Bank, are that it made few attempts to involve the local population and paid little attention to local

conditions such as land tenure systems. In other words, it overlooked the institutional nature of change.

Development and Ecofeminism

The first attempt to tie together issues of development, women, and the environment was perhaps that of Carolyn Merchant [1989]. Merchant's classic *The Death of Nature* investigated the association between women and nature in Western European thought and the impact of industrialization in Europe on dominant perceptions of nature and on the economic and social status of women.⁹ Inspired in part by Merchant's work, Vandana Shiva has become a leading voice in the ecofeminist critique of development and its consequences for both women and the environment in the Third World.

Shiva characterizes development as a Western, masculine project of modernization that has involved the subjugation of women and nature.

The violence to nature, which seems intrinsic to the dominant development model, is also associated with violence to women who depend on nature for drawing sustenance for themselves, their families, their societies. This violence against nature and women is built into the very mode of perceiving both, and forms the basis of the current development paradigm [Shiva 1989, xvi].

Shiva also attacks development and technological progress as reductionist. In her view, development has resulted in environmental destruction, thereby reducing nature's capacity to sustain life. This destruction is most obvious, she argues, in the area of forestry, where the practice of establishing timber plantations, introduced by colonial administrations and later carried on by independent governments under the sponsorship of international development agencies, has led to soil erosion, elimination of indigenous species, and destruction of the water cycle in many areas.¹⁰ Development has also reduced "other" epistemologies by denying the wisdom of "traditional societies" and replacing it with modern science. Shiva argues that women's leadership of environmental struggles and a return to "traditional" knowledge and practices provide the key to transforming development from an oppressive, destructive process to a more equitable, sustainable one.

The value of Shiva's work derives mainly from her critique of economic development. Her critique profoundly highlights the stranglehold that the logic of the market and faith in untrammelled economic growth has on people in Less Developed Countries. She particularly faults development for having altered the primary function of economic systems from provisioning for local people to producing for international markets. This, of course, is in stark contrast to the WID position, whose underlying theme of modernization makes it insufficiently critical of economic de-

velopment. However, by this sweeping condemnation of Western science and technology, Shiva falls into a trap of her own reductionism, attributing all the problems of poor countries to modernity and "progress." More to the point, Shiva's attempt to draw universal parallels between women and nature overlooks the specific institutional milieus where women interact with nature.

Women and Nature: Theoretical or Contextual?

The fundamental question underlying the discourse on development, gender, and the environment is that of the relationship between women and nature. On this question, WID and ecofeminism diverge significantly. Indeed, they create two extreme views of how women and nature are related based on general assumptions and theories held by each approach. The WID position, represented in the World Bank literature and operations, tends to disproportionately implicate women in environmental degradation, whereas the ecofeminist position tends to present women's attitudes toward the environment as largely benign. In reality, women's experiences everywhere represent a vast continuum between these two extremes, conditioned in each case by different economies, histories, and cultures expressed in different institutions.

In the WID position, women hold the same anthropocentric attitudes toward nature as men; there is no claim of a singular relationship between women and nature. Women's engagement in environmental destruction is interpreted as a manifestation of their poverty and lack of resources rather than their gendered identity. In the case of deforestation in Sub-Saharan Africa, inadequate access to financial and technological resources limits women's ability to use "less destructive energy gathering practices" [Clones 1992, 21]. Poor women must rely on fuelwood instead of modern fuels such as oil and gas. Poor farmers, including women, resort to extensive cultivation in lieu of yield-boosting complementary inputs such as fertilizers. Forest destruction then is interpreted as a rational decision by the poor in the face of limited access to modern energy sources and agricultural inputs [World Bank 1991]. This interpretation of poverty as a primary cause of environmental degradation forms the basic premise of the sustainable development paradigm and is well articulated in major Bank documents [World Bank 1987a; 1992a].

Since women are overly represented among the poor, this premise tends to unwittingly implicate women in environmental degradation to a greater extent than is borne out by the evidence. For example, in Africa the Bank has largely focused on forest destruction as a result of firewood gathering—mostly done by women [World Bank 1983; 1988]. But, the male-dominated charcoal industry that supplies urban centers with fuel contributes more to deforestation in the region than the sparse collection of firewood by women in rural areas [Zein-Elabdin 1993]. Although the Bank has recently acknowledged this fact [World Bank 1994a], it continues to focus

on the role of women in forest destruction. This disproportionate implication of women in environmental degradation is articulated in what the Bank calls the "poverty-gender-environment nexus" [World Bank 1993], where women are linked to ecological destruction through their poverty. In fact, the only instances where gender is explicitly mentioned in relation to environmental problems usually involve women. In effect, women's gender becomes a vector for ecological destruction.¹¹ Having said all that, the Bank's position still has the desirable characteristic of locating women's relationship to the environment in the material conditions under which women live and obtain their livelihood.

By contrast, the ecofeminist position as articulated in Shiva's work generally emphasizes the "intimate" relationship between women and nature.¹²

In the perspective of women engaged in survival struggles which are, simultaneously, struggles for the protection of nature, women and nature are intimately related, and their domination and liberation similarly linked [Shiva 1989, 47].

Shiva argues that this relationship exists on a symbolic as well as a material level. On a symbolic level, she relates that, in Indian cosmology, nature (*Prakriti*) is considered to be the embodiment of the "feminine principle."¹³ On a material level, she stresses the role of Indian women as the "primary sustainers of society," providing food, water, and fuel and tending to animals. On both levels, environmental problems represent the loss of the feminine principle: "The ecological crisis is, at its root, the death of the feminine principle, symbolically as well as in contexts such as rural India, not merely in form and symbol, but also in the everyday processes of survival and sustenance" [Shiva 1989, 42]. Shiva suggests that recovery of the feminine principle is key to transforming development to a more sustainable course, thereby assigning the responsibility for ecological leadership to women.

This line of thinking seeks to establish a metaphysical, supra-material relationship between women and nature and is therefore highly problematic. It is based on an essentialist understanding of the relationship between women and nature; therefore it does not explain this relationship. Nor does it explain the extent to which this symbolic association between women and nature in cultural imagery may be rooted in historical, material origins [Agarwal 1992; Jackson 1993]. Because of this fundamental weakness, this line of thinking falls into circular reasoning to the point where one is not quite certain which domination preceded the other. Has nature been dominated because it is perceived to be female, or are women dominated because they are associated with nature?

Equally problematic is how ecofeminism accounts for the impact of modernization and development on other groups besides women, e.g., workers, Africans, and other members of non-industrialized societies. So far the development of capitalism throughout the world has involved significant subjugation and exploitation of all these groups. There is an intractable dilemma. Acknowledging the similar impact

on groups other than women considerably dilutes the ecofeminist point, whereas ignoring it is an unacceptable omission. In fact, both Shiva and Merchant acknowledge that the exploitative character of capitalist development is not limited to women, but both nonetheless go on to single out women in order to maintain the premise of their argument.¹⁴

More pertinently, this line of thinking presents nature as a static, ahistorical entity while absolving women of all responsibility for environmental degradation. In this view, women seem to be blessed with an inherent cognizance of environmental phenomena. This cognizance is reflected in Shiva's accounts of women's knowledge of local ecosystems and adoption of sustainable practices. But, this celebration of women's closeness to nature is not balanced by contrasting accounts of women partaking in environmental destruction, in India or otherwise. Although she recognizes that not all women are environmentally conscious, she attributes that to the loss of a natural essence they once possessed. "The principle of creating and conserving life is lost to the ecologically alienated, consumerist elite women of the Third World and the over-consuming west" [Shiva 1989, 42].¹⁵

The upshot is that the WID and the ecofeminist interpretations of the relationship between women and nature represent two extremes in this discourse. The former tends to disproportionately implicate women in ecological destruction, while the latter tends to exempt women from all ecological accountability. These extreme tendencies are an inevitable consequence of the absence of institutional analysis in the two approaches. Such an analysis will reveal a multiplicity of patterns of women interacting with the environment that can hardly be captured in few universal principles or assumptions.

I argue instead that women's relationship to nature is *contextual*. That is to say, this relationship is molded by the specific institutional contexts of women's interplay with their natural environments. These institutional contexts include natural resources, the technology and the means of subsistence, as well as gender specification and other institutions that embody the history and culture of a society. These institutions establish distinct patterns of thought and behavior reflected in the organization of provisioning activities and in accumulated wisdom about the environment. Experiences of women in Less Developed Countries indicate how these contexts are articulated in particular attitudes and responses to environmental challenges. The following three examples of women's environmental initiatives from Asia, Africa, and Latin America illustrate that in each case women became involved in environmental issues based on certain local socioeconomic conditions that cannot fruitfully be incorporated into generalized theories or universal axioms.

The Chipko ecological movement in India is a well-known example, if vulgarized in the literature. Chipko (tree hugging) began in the Himalayas in 1973. Workers of a local cooperative (Sarvodaya) called for Chipko rallies to protest the government forestry policy that favored large commercial logging companies over

small local enterprises such as Sarvodaya. Villagers, who were overwhelmingly female, held successful Chipko rallies that reportedly prevented the cutting of 300 trees [Shiva 1989, 73]. Gradually, the movement assumed an explicitly ecological character. But this was no accident. The area had suffered from severe deforestation that had caused soil erosion and flooding that threatened the integrity of the local ecology [World Resources Institute 1985]. In addition, gender-specific roles and subsistence activities in the area render women responsible for forest use and management, collecting food, firewood, and other forest products. In the Garhwal region of Uttar Pradesh, where Chipko began, women perform 98 percent of all farm labor [Shiva 1989, 70]. In effect, there was a clear material basis for the women's involvement in the Chipko struggle.

Similarly, in Sub-Saharan Africa deforestation is the primary environmental challenge. It is estimated that from 1981 to 1990, the forest area in the region declined by 7 percent [World Bank 1994a, 17]. The sexual division of labor in most of Sub-Saharan Africa assigns the tasks of gathering fuelwood, fetching water, and cultivating food crops to women. It is hardly a surprise then that the main environmental initiative organized by women, the Green Belt movement in Kenya, is a series of reforestation campaigns. Launched in 1977 by the National Council of Women in Kenya, the movement seeks to slow deforestation, promote indigenous tree species, and provide sources of income for women. The movement enlists different women's groups in the country to establish nurseries and plant greenbelts (trees) around their communities [Maathai 1988]. By 1992, the Green Belt movement had planted more than 7 million trees in Kenya [Merchant 1992, 203]. No doubt this success derives from women's vital interest in trees as their source of livelihood. In the district of Kiambu, where the movement has successfully slowed down the rate of forest depletion, women represent from 60 to 70 percent of farm labor [Hyma and Nyamwange 1993, 39].

By contrast, in Latin America, gender specification does not afford women a central role in agriculture [Boserup 1970; Flora and Santos 1986]; this is reflected in the predominance of young women in rural-urban migration [Radcliffe 1993]. In urban areas, paid domestic work has historically been one of the most common occupations for women [Boserup 1970]. It is no surprise that environmental initiatives by women have targeted urban problems such as solid waste management. An example of these initiatives is in Mexico where women have introduced and operated a waste management and recycling system in the town of Mérida. The system, known as SIRDO, was developed in 1978 by GTA (Grupo de Tecnología Alternativa), a small local group founded by a female architect to introduce technologies for organic waste recycling in urban areas.¹⁶ The women of Mérida manage the system on a cooperative basis, thereby easing the waste problem in the town and generating income from the sale of the resulting sludge as a fertilizer. By 1985, SIRDO was hailed by the national press as a potential solution for solid waste problems in the

urban areas of Mexico [Leonard 1989]. Again, there was a certain institutional setting that led the women of Mérida to engage in this project.

It would be unwise to over-generalize from these three cases or to exclude cases where women's actions are detrimental to the environment.¹⁷ However, the examples do clearly suggest that women's awareness of and responses to environmental exigencies are determined by the institutional conditions governing their activities, rather than by a universal affinity to nature or by a tendency for rational optimization. In all cases, gender specification was a central factor. Threats to the environment and to means of subsistence in the Himalayas and in Kenya come mainly from forest destruction and decline in agricultural productivity. Because gender-specified roles in these two regions put women at the center of these issues as farmers and fuelwood gatherers, it is no wonder that women in India and in Kenya organized to protect farming and forest resources. On the other hand, the example from Mexico reflects an urbanized region where waste management and pollution control are an immediate part of daily lives and where domestic service, including cleaning and waste disposal, as an occupation for women is established tradition.

The WID and the ecofeminist perspectives can each offer a rationale for women's involvement in these different activities, capturing the generality of the situations. The WID approach would presume that in each case women were motivated by economic gain, while ecofeminists might suggest that they were expressing their inner connection with nature and their superior ability to care for it. But surely, neither perspective can account for the particular patterns of women's responses to environmental conditions. These responses can be most perceptively revealed by a study of the institutions that generated certain courses of action and forms of expression. The remainder of this paper is devoted to an articulation of the substance and significance of this institutional approach.

Redrawing the Discourse: The Institutional Nature of Gender

As outlined above, the current discourse on women and the environment lacks a good grasp of the institutional character of economic processes in general and of gender specification in particular. This lack of understanding of gender specification and its economic impact is not unique to WID or to the development literature at large. Despite considerable discussion of gender recently, this issue has not yet assumed its place in mainstream economics. The reason, in my view, is a lack of comprehension of its economic and political significance.¹⁸ I argue here that only an institutional perspective is capable of fully legitimating gender as a subject of study in economics and of bringing forth its full economic, political and cultural significance.¹⁹ Moreover, it will place women's relation to the environment in its historical and cultural context and therefore illuminate various policy approaches to this question.

The thrust of institutions can still be best represented by Walton Hamilton's description: an institution

connotes a way of thought or action of some prevalence and permanence, which is embedded in the *habits* of a group or the customs of a people. . . . Institutions fix the confines of and impose form upon the activities of human beings. The world of use and wont, to which imperfectly we accommodate our lives, is a tangled and unbroken web of institutions [Hamilton 1932, 84; emphasis added].

Based on this description, gender specification can be defined as an institution, a social framework that establishes distinct roles for groups and individuals, fixing the confines of and imposing form upon the activities of women and men, in a persistent, regularly observed manner. This definition is based on Veblen's concept of institutions as "habits of thought" [Veblen 1973].²⁰ Gender specification is nothing but a collection of historically and culturally determined habits of thought. These habits are not gathered in one body or aspect of life, but are diffused throughout the social fiber of a society as to become implicit terms of reference for men and women. These habits are so diffused and deeply embedded in the social fiber as to render gender specification and its articulation in economic activity virtually invisible. They have become "axiomatic and indispensable by habituation and general acceptance" [Veblen 1923, 101; emphasis added].

Having characterized gender specification as a consequence of a web of institutions, its economic significance can be fully revealed only by an understanding of economic systems in their substantive meaning, i.e., the actual processes of provisioning and material "want satisfaction" [Polanyi 1957]. These provisioning processes are rooted in the history, culture, and environment of a society, where humans interact with these through certain institutions, hence the economy as instituted process [Polanyi 1957].²¹ As Waller and Jennings [1991] have recognized, Polanyi's ideas are most conducive to studying gender issues, and by extension, the actual points of interaction between women and the environment within different economies. What is even more important is that in this institutional approach gender specification assumes equal importance to other institutions, including markets, in terms of its economic and political significance and implications. This conceptualization is best described in Polanyi's own words: "religion or government may be as important for the structure and functioning of the economy as monetary institutions or the availability of tools and machines themselves that lighten the toil of labor" [1957, 250]. Accordingly, institutional economics is most capable of placing gender at an equal footing with other "legitimate" subjects of study in economics.

In a broad and rudimentary sense, as an institution, gender specification in any particular society defines distinct roles for women and men in production, as it also determines their relative shares in the resulting output. For example, in many countries women grow subsistence crops and derive non-monetary income, while men

grow cash crops and receive cash income, giving them greater access to property and wealth. Given that production and distribution are the primary functions of all economic systems, gender specification becomes *fundamental* rather than incidental. By fundamental, I do not mean that it is primordial, predating all social relations, but simply that it is as fundamental to economic processes as other institutions. It permeates all economic activities and relations and helps set the relative positions of women and men in the economy.

This discussion of gender specification should not imply that it is a universal, ahistorical construct. On the contrary, institutions are culture specific and evolving—albeit sluggishly—in response to different economic stimuli. Considering this nature of institutions, the particular form in which gender specification helps determine the economic fortunes of men and women can only be understood within specific temporal and spatial contexts, e.g., late nineteenth century American corporation, Tamil plantation workers in colonial Sri Lanka, or contemporary households in rural Burkina Faso. This follows W.C. Neale's [1987] identification of institutions as people doing [things], according to certain rules and folkviews. Folkviews, as Neale explains after Hamilton [1932], are a "bundle of intellectual usages" that justify or provide a reason for participation in a certain activity. Rules provide the how of participation in these activities. So that in Burkina Faso, for example, women gather firewood and water, whereas men lead prayers and name the newborn. Folkviews explain why certain types of wood must be gathered and why the naming of newborns can be carried out only on certain days of the week.

Following Neale's outline, the relationship between women and the environment can only be understood when examined in its highly specific institutional milieu. That is how one can explain why women in India and Kenya organized to fight deforestation and soil erosion, while those in Mexico engaged in solid waste management in urban areas; and why—for that matter—women in the United States have organized to fight hazardous waste disposal in their towns. One cannot come up with a universal theory of gender and ecological sustainability in the tradition of neoclassical economics (i.e., rationality and choice) or the views of ecofeminists (i.e., women and nature). Neither can the environment be presented as a static, ahistorical entity. The human-environment relationship is dialectical, evolving out of certain historical sequences. "The community will make use of the forces of the environment for the purposes of its life according to methods learned in the past and embodied in these institutions" [Veblen 1973, 134].

In each of the examples of women's initiatives discussed in this paper, specific—sometimes unique—institutions generated the patterns of provisioning and environmental activity observed. In Kenya, women's groups are rooted in the Kenyan tribal tradition. Among the Gikuyu, they were known as Ngwatio; among the Luo, they were called Saga. These groups were women's venues for social expression and mutual economic and social help [Wamalwa 1991]. By allowing each regional or local

group to organize its own campaign based on its own needs, the Green Belt movement successfully utilized this old institution to mobilize women for reforestation efforts. Similarly, in the case of Chipko, forests and trees go back deeply in Indian culture, where trees have long been worshipped by both men and women. The Chipko movement itself is based on an Indian legend where 300 years ago the women of Bishnoi sacrificed themselves to save their trees from elimination by clinging to them [Shiva 1989]. Since the study of institutions such as these is a fundamental part of institutional economic analysis, this approach lends itself best to telling the stories of women and the environment in different societies.

To be sure, it is not sufficient to merely recognize the presence of institutions. In fact, institutional reform in Less Developed Countries is the new mandate in World Bank operations [World Bank 1994a]. It is more important to appreciate how these institutions govern social activity, interact with one another, and mutate over time. That is why it is imperative to distinguish the two institutional schools. The World Bank reform is based on the "new institutional" concept of institutions as the incentive structure for society, hence the Bank's notion that institutional reform is needed to allow efficient decisions by individuals. This view perceives that people uniformly respond to stimuli, thereby entirely missing the cultural idiosyncrasy and path dependence of institutions. It also misses the nature of institutions as habits of thought; therefore it recognizes land tenure systems and forestry departments as institutions but not gender specification. In consequence, the Bank calls for greater inclusion of women in development projects (to raise efficiency) but not for examining gender specification as a source of discrimination in society and bias in the outcomes of these projects against women.²²

The ecofeminist position, on the other hand, recognizes institutions to a greater extent than the WID position. Shiva pays considerable attention to history and cultural tradition. Indeed, her economic perspective is much akin to the "old" institutionalist one because she perceives of economies as provisioning systems and processes and blames development for having replaced this character with narrow, profit-motivated market exchange. Nevertheless, her attempt to construct a unique link between women and nature across different cultural and historical backgrounds clouds her analysis and deprives it of great validity. As mentioned earlier, even when she recognizes the different environmental attitudes among women from different economic strata, she attributes that to loss of a natural quality instead of their habitual conditioning by different institutions.

Given the limitations of the WID and the ecofeminist paradigms and on the basis of the conceptualization of gender and women's relationship to the environment presented in this paper, the discourse on development, gender, and the environment may be redrawn along the following lines: *how gender specification as an institution is articulated in economic processes, generating certain income and wealth distribution patterns; and how this articulation determines the extent of sustainability of the*

natural environment within particular historical and cultural parameters. In other words, the problem is identifying and understanding the actual institutions and economic processes that lead to gender-specific attitudes and actions toward the environment and use of natural resources within different historical and cultural confines as opposed to undertaking a theoretical dissection of development, gender, and the environment. This format neither attempts to "integrate" women (as a homogeneous group) in a process of sustainable development nor tries to ascribe a special role to them in leading environmental recovery by virtue of their unique affinity to nature.

The implications of this institutional conceptual framework with respect to research method should be clear, as many institutionalists have found. By its very nature, an institutional approach does not a priori specify any definite method of analysis. Different methods are dictated by different cases in question. Some cases may require quantitative treatment (in a generic rather than an econometric sense); others may rely on storytelling, while others may still combine both. In fact, the pertinence of the institutional approach to the treatment of gender issues may be evidenced by the prominence of narratives and storytelling in feminist epistemology, where experience and practice are emphasized as well as theory, and where history and empirical study are large.²³

The conceptual outline proposed here has important advantages: (1) it brings to light the scope of gender specification as a limiting factor for men as well as women; and (2) it unmask the political underpinnings of gender issues. With respect to the first point, gender specification may impose constraints, though disproportionately few, on men as well as women. These constraints can be significant in some situations. In many parts of Africa, land tenure systems are highly gender-specified (e.g., among the Igbo of Nigeria). While in most cases these are more enabling for men than for women, in some cases they can present constraints for men.²⁴ For instance, in Luapula, a matrilineal society in Zambia, women have sole rights to land [Poewe 1981]. Thus, landless men are at a disadvantage. In consequence, drawing the discourse in terms of gender specification as an institution vis-à-vis women as a group highlights inequities toward men that may be eclipsed by the focus on women.

Formulating the discourse in terms of the institutional confines of gender and the environment also unmask the political elements behind gender issues. The WID view tends to de-politicize gender issues by disguising them under efficiency considerations.²⁵ On the other hand, the ecofeminist position broadly condemns the dual subordination of women and nature but withholds any discussion of the role of local power structures in both environmental degradation and female subordination. Agarwal [1992] documented the role of the state in India, through land privatization, in redefining land ownership in favor of well-off farmers who are predominantly male. An institutional analysis will bring such facts to light, thereby revealing the power structures that privilege many men over many women and the

political interests standing in the way of gender-based redefinition of power relations and wealth distribution. Political interests may also explain why, for instance, the idea of gender-based land reform has not been seriously considered by economists or policymakers.

To summarize, both the WID and the ecofeminist approaches imply some universal, essential character in women, therefore muting the varied social settings of environmental problems and women's responses to them. An institutional analysis based on the economics of Veblen and Polanyi can help avoid the pitfalls of theoretical generalization over such a broad area and can add light to this discourse on development, gender, and the environment by emphasizing the multiplicity and complexity of these settings and by unmasking the economic and political significance of gender specification. This light, however, can be seen only by analysis of the specific contexts where women come in contact with the natural environment.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have suggested using an institutional framework to analyze the intersection of development, gender, and the environment. This framework is based on an interpretation of gender specification as an institution in the Veblenian sense of habits of thought and on Polanyi's definition of the economy as instituted provisioning processes, thereby fully legitimating gender specification as a subject of study from an economic viewpoint, and appreciating its role in determining the relative economic and social positions of women and men in society. The three areas of development, gender, and the environment can be juxtaposed only to the extent that they interact within specific historical and cultural institutional contexts, rather than in an abstract theoretical domain.

The analysis in this paper points to a number of directions for future research. Some have to do with the individual subjects of development, gender, and the environment; the most obvious of those is gender specification. Others combine more than one of these subjects. I will only mention a few that cut across all three. First, future research should investigate how gender specification in Less Developed Countries is manifested in certain peculiar attitudes toward the environment. One example is the extent to which gender-based differences in income, land ownership, and technology result in differentiated impacts on environmental conditions. Considerable information exists regarding these factors, but it does not particularly focus on the environment or women's relationship to it. The second direction for research derives from the current tendency of the sustainable development paradigm to blame the poor, who are disproportionately female, for environmental degradation. Research should examine the institutional relationship between poverty and environmental degradation and where precisely women enter this problematic. Examining this relationship should establish the extent to which certain instituted processes—

rather than poverty as an abstract category—result in environmental degradation. The third area for research concerns the ways in which international development institutions, primarily the World Bank but also others, shape policy with respect to both women and the environment. Such investigations require gathering of vast and differentiated bodies of data, and greater attention to detail and peculiarities than is currently seen in economics.

Notes

1. The United Nations declared 1975-85 a decade for women as a result of a realization that women were in most respects lagging behind men. Over the same period, international concern with the environment grew and was eventually articulated by the Brundtland Commission as the concept of sustainable development [World Commission on Environment and Development 1987]. These disparate concerns were brought together by Vandana Shiva, the Indian physicist, in her 1989 book *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology and Development*. Shiva's work highlighted the negative impact of development on both women and the environment in Less Developed Countries and in effect began this discourse on women, development, and the environment. For a history of this discourse and its varied aspects, see Braidotti et al. [1994] and Homberg [1993].
2. WID has recently moved to a "gender and development" approach, but its philosophical underpinnings have not changed [Zein-Elabdin 1995]. Ecofeminism is a broad umbrella for a number of differing views and approaches to both feminism and the environment. These views range from the liberal that sanctions industrialization and development, with reluctant willingness to accept some reforms to ensure human survival, to the radical that attributes environmental degradation to the capitalist mode of production [see Merchant 1992]. The common thread in all ecofeminist scholarship is the connection between women and nature for a variety of reasons. This paper is primarily concerned with ecofeminist thought with reference to Less Developed Countries.
3. Waller and Jennings [1991] argue that Polanyi's substantive definition of the economy "allows for and facilitates the inclusion of gender in economic analysis," but they stop short of considering gender specification itself as a substantive aspect of any economy. This point will be discussed later.
4. Of course, the importance of institutions and their implications for economic analysis has been a defining feature of what is now known as the "old" institutional economics since Veblen began to examine them within economic systems more than a century ago. This paper builds on and extends this tradition with the explicit discussion of gender specification as an institution.
5. The World Bank repeatedly emphasizes the prevalence of poverty among women in the Third World [see Annual Reports 1984, 1987b, 1989b]. The Bank's report on women in Kenya, one of its relatively few detailed studies on women, shows that the income of rural female heads of households is approximately two-thirds that of a male head for most income-generating activities [World Bank 1989a]. Current social indicators show that women are still lagging behind. Average adult illiteracy rates among females are significantly higher than among males in every region of the non-industrialized world [World Bank 1994b]. Women's participation in the political process, represented by the percentage of females in legislative bodies, is extremely low even in the developed countries [United Nations 1991]. The latest human development report powerfully documents the economic gap between women and men worldwide [United Nations Development Program 1995].

6. Unfortunately, a critique of the WID approach is beyond the scope of this paper. The approach has been critiqued by numerous writers [see Elson 1991; Zein-Elabdin 1995].
7. An example of these projects is the Gambia WID project approved in 1990. The project aims at improving environmental quality in the country by extending financial support for female farmers and improving their skills of understanding and dealing with environmental issues [Clones 1992].
8. The strategy document states that "forest sector investment operations will undoubtedly enhance the Bank's overall development objectives, namely, poverty alleviation, environmental protection, privatization, and increased women's participation in the development process" [World Bank 1994a, 45].
9. Merchant explains that throughout history the image of nature has swayed between a kind, nurturing mother and a wild, destructive female. She suggests that the scientific/industrial revolution resulted in fading out of the former image and its replacement by the latter, which has in effect sanctioned the exploitation and destruction of nature that industrialization has entailed.
10. Shiva is severely critical of World Bank projects in India as prime examples of reductionist forestry. The Kolar project in Karnataka is one of these. According to Shiva, traditional forestry practices in this district were based on agroforestry, where different plant and animal species are cultivated within the same spatial arrangement, thereby preserving and enriching the ecological cycle. The Kolar forestry project eliminated this practice and replaced indigenous species with eucalyptus plantations. This undermined the local means of subsistence and damaged the local ecology, where Kolar today is drought-ridden.
11. Another area where the Bank links women to ecological threats is population growth [see annual Bank reports 1984, 1990, 1992].
12. Not all ecofeminists share this view of an inherent link between women and nature. Some articulate their ideas simply on the level of pragmatic alliances between feminist and ecological struggles. For example, see the introduction to the 1989 edition of *Death of Nature*. What is known as "cultural ecofeminism" is most associated with the idea of a spiritual bond between women and nature [see Merchant 1992; Diamond and Orenstein 1990; King 1990; Caldecott and Leland 1983].
13. Though she does not quite explain what it is, Shiva distinguishes this feminine principle (Shakti) from the masculine principle (Purusha). She explains that through the conjunction of these two principles, Prakriti creates the world. Shiva then articulates her "non-gender based philosophy." "In this non-gender based philosophy the feminine principle is not exclusively embodied in women, but is the principle of activity and creativity in nature, women and men. One cannot really distinguish the masculine from the feminine, person from nature, Purusha from Prakriti. Though distinct, they remain inseparable in dialectical unity, as two aspects of one being. The recovery of the feminine principle is thus associated with the non-patriarchal, non-gendered category of creative non-violence, or 'creative power in peaceful form'" [Shiva 1989, 52].
14. Merchant mentions in passing the historical impact of industrialization on groups other than women: "nature, women, blacks, and wage laborers were set on a path toward a new status as 'natural' and human resources for the modern world system" [1989, 288]. She leaves out the domination of non-European societies through colonization.
15. Bina Agarwal [1992] criticizes Shiva for her undue emphasis on the ideological aspects of this discourse. Instead, she argues, women's awareness of the environment comes simply from their daily contact with it as a source of material existence, no more. Agarwal's own idea of feminist environmentalism is an intermediate position in this discourse.
16. SIRDO is the Spanish acronym for Integrated System for Recycling Organic Wastes [Leonard 1989].
17. For examples of these, see Baxter [1981].

18. Of course, the matter is not simply a lack of comprehension, but also political interests. For that reason, it is not meant to imply here that the mere improvement in the understanding of gender specification is sufficient for ending the subordinate position of women. These considerations will be discussed shortly.
19. Institutional analysis here refers to the tradition of Veblen and its extension in the work of Polanyi. This is distinguished from the "new institutional economics" as articulated in the writings of Douglass North [e.g., 1981; 1990]. The difference between the two can scarcely be overstated and has been pointed out by many institutionalists. The latter sees institutions as simply a constraint on individual behavior within markets, whereas the former suggests that markets are but one set of institutions in a complex cultural setting. As Hodgson [1993] points out, the "new institutional" approach recognizes the role of institutions but leaves the neoclassical optimizing individual intact.
20. I am not concerned here with Veblen's discussions of the status of women in society that are found in numerous parts of his work, as important as these are. Rather, I am more interested in his basic concept of institutions insofar as it provides an understanding of gender as an institutional parameter.
21. This, of course, is the same meaning found in Veblen's work. "These institutions are habitual methods of carrying on the life process of the community in contact with the material environment in which it lives" [1973, 134]. Also, "for the purpose of economic science the process of cumulative change that is to be accounted for is the sequence of change in the methods of doing things, —the methods of dealing with the material means of life" [Veblen 1898, 387].
22. An example of lack of recognition of gender is the World Bank's recent forestry strategy for Africa mentioned earlier. Though the strategy calls for a bigger role for African women in development and proposes a number of policies with profound potential gender implications (e.g., privatization of forest resources), the strategy is completely silent on the potential impacts on women. Nor is there any other Bank literature showing that the sexual division of labor or the gender basis of land tenure and income distribution in the areas where these policies are to be implemented have been systematically investigated [Zein-Elabdin 1995]. For a discussion of the impact of privatization on women's land ownership in Africa, see Davison [1988] and Kanogo [1992]; for Asia, see Agarwal [1992] and Shiva [1989].
23. Waller and Jennings [1990] have pointed out the congruence of institutionalist and feminist epistemologies as both reject the Cartesian foundations of science and perceive of knowledge as socially constructed, in addition to their study of ongoing processes.
24. Among the Igbo, land tenure is separate from that of trees, and men and women have elaborately differentiated rights to each and within each tenure system [see Obi 1963].
25. Of course, the efficiency criterion is itself political in nature, although not recognized as such.

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