

## GENDER INEQUALITY STILL A CRITICAL ISSUE IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF RURAL KWAZULU-NATAL

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The aim of this paper is to discuss and analyse the status and importance of women's advancement in the development process of developing regions, with special reference to KwaZulu-Natal. It critically analyses various theories on the role of women in development. There is a two-way relationship between women's involvement and economic development, that is, as economic development takes place there is the likelihood that more women will become involved in the economic and socio-political setting of that particular economy. On the other hand, women's involvement in economic and socio-political activities will help enhance development opportunities of that particular economy.

In theory women should not be seen as passive recipients of development assistance, but they should be given an opportunity to take part in development.

KwaZuluNatal is the province with largest proportion of females than male (53.1 %), following Northern Province (54%) and Eastern Cape (53.9%). About 62% live in non-urban areas, of whom 98% are Africans (OHS, 1995). More women (62%) than men (60%) live in non-urban areas (SSA, 1996a). In 1995, the province had a non-urban women-unemployment rate of approximately 53%, compared to only 34% of men (SSA,1996a). According to SSA (1998a), about 53% of households in KwaZulu-Natal that use wood as an energy source travel more than a kilometre to fetch it. In rural areas the task of collecting wood is mainly the function of women. About 29% of households in KwaZulu-Natal, compared to 32% in South Africa, have a telephone inside the dwelling (SSA, 1998a). In the province, while health facilities are available to most Africans, 66 percent of the households in non-urban areas in KwaZulu-Natal travel at least five kilometers to reach the nearest medical service centre (SSA, 1998a). According to the KwaZulu-Natal Provincial Alliance RDP Committee (1994:3), 19% and 74% of KwaZulu-Natal's urban and rural population, respectively, do not have adequate water supply. About 40% and 94% of KwaZulu-Natal's urban and rural population, respectively, do not have adequate sanitation facilities. The educational situation is worse for women in KwaZulu-Natal. Twenty-one percent have received no education at all (SSA, 1998a).

Various initiatives are being implemented in the province to address and boost economic activities and issues like gender inequality in the province. The circumstances and problems experienced by the women living in the rural areas of KwaZulu-Natal demand urgent attention in the form of policy and development action.

Across the world there seem to be various moves to address gender issues, this shows the importance of women's involvement in development. In March 1996 the United States

Agency for International Development adopted the Gender Plan of Action, which is a policy document set (three main goals) to build commitment to consider gender issues as key development issues, to build capacity (or capability) to address gender in all Agency programs, and to build incentives for consideration of gender issues (USAID, 1999: 3-4). Corner (1998) notes that women contribute to the APEC economies as workers in employment and the informal sector, as entrepreneurs and investors in business, and through their unpaid work.

The paper concludes that women's advancement will play a crucial role in the development of the province, and this can be generalized to other developing regions.

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