

Women Development Practitioners and Processes of Empowerment:

Stories from Odisha, India

introduction

lessons from the field on the ways in which women development practitioners

- practice the advocacy of rights to empower vulnerable sections of communities,
- including themselves.

Focus on govt program of ICDS

Women waiting on the roadside for kerosene in
Macchkund;
Where is their agency?



The process of
creating 'agency'



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Two premises for the study

- The premise of “Cooperative enquiry” --Every person is self determining and has at least 3 kinds of knowledge– (a)practical knwl(how to do smthng); (b)experiential knwl(direct encounter); (c) propositional knw (abt smthng expressed in statements n theories);
- Make problematic the lived experience of ordinary people; directly available to policy makers to make programs/services relevant to people’s lives;

Public hearing-making voices heard



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The process (in Tangi)



ICDS

- Flagship program- 1975
- improve the nutritional and health status of below 6 children, pregnant and lactating mothers;
- psychological, physical and social development of the child;
- To reduce the incidence of mortality, morbidity, malnutrition and school dropouts;
- achieve effective coordination of policy and implementation among various ministries to promote child development;
- enhance the capability of the mother to look after the normal health and nutritional needs of the child through proper health and nutrition education.

Research questions

1. Have women development practitioners been able to empower vulnerable sections of a community by enabling access to rights to food entitlements, health care, for instance?
2. Has the process of engagement as 'duty-bearers' enabled their own 'agency'?
3. Have the women practitioners been able to challenge existing power dynamics and social inequalities?

methodology

- Across 3 districts- 2 urban slums, 10 villages in Jan-Feb 2013
- In depth interviews; group discussions; narratives; unstructured open ended interviews; photographs; audio tape conversations;
- 2 broad categories of local development practitioners

Development practitioners

State (local) actors

Local level

Anganwadi Centres (AWC)

Self Help Groups

Cooks and Helpers for midday meal schemes

Non state actors

NGO field investigators

Community based organizations at village level

Have practitioners been able to enable and empower vulnerable sections?

State actors

AWCs– “safe space” for battered women; ex-16yr old; Health care facility; pregnant w; Creche during work hours for HHhelp; farm labour
Nutritious food; in KBK areas hot meals for old and disabled all week;
SHGs- income gen projects; savings; sharing during imp occasions; access to banks

Non-state actors

In K processes take longer; remote areas; tribal comm; forest based; displacement by devp; poverty doubles; land rights won; special provisions; young girls as prctnrs; wmn travel to town for public hearing; trained to voice; interface with offcils; to cross-check complaints; know rts; encourage discussions on common issues; demand repairs of pumps; ration cards;

Enabling access: state actors



SHG,AWH,AWW,NGO



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Has it enabled own agency?

A job for educated w; single widowed women; traditional division of labour; a salary; a status within society and family; finding a voice in financial decisions; bank visits; handling public cash; interface with govt off; public rallies; demand rts to pension, insurance; collective action; access to resources; dm role; pol leadership evolving; panchayat elections

Breaking social norms; stepping out; a job; traveling within district; voicing concerns; status; interaction with both sex; understanding comtmnt; respnsibility; creating and demanding safe spaces; sharing stories to enable each other; single young women as devp actors; learning to negotiate and demand;

Challenging inequalities

Within families

Creating new contexts socially- a cadre of working women across districts

Winning panchayat elections;

Caste barriers breaking

Gender dynamics questioned (intra-HH; society)

Creating income opportunities for rural women

Introducing rights, demand rights/ justice by vulnerable sections

Understanding the role of public servants/ state

Panchayat leaders



Findings– and yet...

- challenges faced in making rights a reality (transport, safety, norms, multiple roles and responsibilities)
- In balancing different govt inter-sectoral competing demands to their time
- Interdependence and indivisibility of rights
- Cooperative enquiry into practical and experiential knowledge base of women has a bearing upon discourses of empowerment

- ... “emancipatory outcomes in social processes depend on the development of new contexts of interaction, achieved through communication ...and collective action” (Nancy Fraser 1989)
- Any discourse on rights, empowerment and development has to listen to the voices of the local practitioner

.....Thank You.....