

Gender and Technologies of Knowledge in Development Discourse:

Analysing United Nations Least Developed Country Policy 1971-2004

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Abbreviations

APQLI	Augmented Physical Quality of Life Index
AusAID	Australian Agency for International Development
CCA	United Nations Common Country Assessment
CIDA	Canadian International Development Agency
ECOSOC	Economic and Social Council
EDI	Economic Diversification Index
EU	European Union
EVI	Economic Vulnerability Index
FAO	United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation
GAD	Gender and Development
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GNI	Gross National Income
GNP	Gross National Product
HAI	Human Assets Index
HIPC	Highly Indebted Poor Countries
ICPD	UN International Conference on Population and Development 1994-2004
ICPD+5	UN International Conference on Population and Development Five Year Review 1999
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
IDA	International Development Association
LDC	Least Developed Country
LICUS	Low Income Countries Under Stress
MTRC 1980	UN Conference on Women, Mid-Term Review Conference 1980
OECD DAC	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, Development Assistance Committee
POA 1991	UN Program of Action on the Least Developed Countries 1991- 2001
POA 2001	UN Program of Action on the Least Developed Countries 2001- 2011
PrepCom	Preparatory Committee Meeting
PRSP	Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers
SAP	Structural Adjustment Programme
SNPA	UN Substantial New Program of Action for the Least Developed Countries 1981- 1991
UN	United Nations
UNCDF	UN Capital Development Fund
UNCDP	UN Committee for Development Planning
UNCTAD	UN Conference on Trade and Development
UNCW 1975	UN Conference on Women 1975
UNDAF	UN Development Assistance Framework
UNDP	UN Development Program
UNGASS	UN General Assembly Session
UNIDO	UN Industrial Development Organisation
WAD	Women and Development
WID	Women in Development
WSIS	UN World Summit on Information Society
WTO	World Trade Organisation

Abstract

The United Nations category Least Developed Country (LDC) was created in 1971 to ameliorate conditions in countries the UN identified as the poorest of the poor. Its administration and operation within UN development discourse has not been explored previously in academic analysis. This thesis explores this rich archive of development discourse. It seeks to situate the LDC category as a vehicle that both produces and is a product of development discourse, and uses gender analysis as a critical tool to identify the ways in which the LDC category discourse operates. The thesis draws on Foucauldian theory to develop and use the concept 'technologies of knowledge', which places the dynamics of LDC discourse into relief. Three technologies of knowledge are identified: LDC policy, classification through criteria, and data. The ways each of these technologies of knowledge operates are explored through detailed readings of over thirty years of UN policy documents that form the thesis's primary source material.

A central question within this thesis is: If the majority of the world's poor are women, where are the women in the policy about the countries that are the poorest of the poor? In focusing the analysis on the representation of women in LDCs, I place women at the centre of the analytic stage, as opposed to the marginal position I have found they occupy within LDC discourse. Through this analysis of the reductionist representations of LDC women, I explore the gendered dynamics of development discourse.

Exploring the operation of these three technologies of knowledge reveals some of the discursive boundaries of UN LDC category discourse, particularly through its inability to incorporate gender analysis. The discussion of these three technologies of knowledge – policy, classification through criteria, and data – is framed by discussions of development and gender. The discussion on development positions this analysis within post-development critiques of development policy, practice and theory. The discussion on gender positions this analysis within the trajectory of postmodern and postcolonial influenced feminist engagements with development as a theory and praxis, particularly with debates about the representation of women in the third world.

This case study of the operation of development discourse usefully highlights gendered dynamics of discursive ways of knowing.

Declaration

I certify that this thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgement any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university; and that to the best of my knowledge and belief it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.

Sarah Goulding

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Words empty out with age. Die and rise again, accordingly invested with new meanings, and always equipped with a secondhand memory.

Trinh T. Minh-ha (1989: 79)

Criticism must think of itself as life-enhancing and constitutively opposed to every form of tyranny, domination, and abuse; its social goals are non-coercive knowledge produced in the interests of human freedom.

Edward Said ([1983] 1991:29)