



OUT OF THE THEORY & INTO THE FIELD

Misinterpreting women's empowerment?: How a feminist postcolonial lens can reveal new dimensions of change in women's lives

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Women's empowerment

- Starting place: Women are oppressed by men, tradition/culture, religion. They are victims, traditional, overworked, uneducated and passive.
- Mechanism: Participation, earning income, gaining skills or education, reducing work, improving services or institutions
- Goal: Increased agency, autonomy, income, decision making power, leadership, confidence
- Measurement: Surveys or focus groups measuring the above, counting women



The rural water project

- Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC)
- 600 handpumps
- Participatory and demand driven approach
- Community management



Women's empowerment in the RWP

- Starting place: Inferior social positions, oppressed by religion and tradition, oppressed by water collection, lacking decision making and management of water
- Mechanism: Water committee participation and time savings
- Goals: Economic and political roles, income generating activities, modern behaviors
- Measurement: Counting number of women participating, monetizing time savings



Gender dynamics in Nampula, Mozambique

- Matrilineal
- Women are the primary water collectors, but men help
- Gender roles are complementary, the division of labor is flexible
- Marital relations marked by respect and support
- Women control the traditional water sources
- Intersectional differences



Outcomes

- Women lose control and social space at the water point
- Only a minority of people use the handpump
- Women on the water committee do more work without pay
- More time to spend with family, resting, and doing domestic work
- Increased pride, beauty, cleanliness, self-esteem
- Ability to perform the activities expected from a Makhuwa wife and mother



Feminist post-colonial lens

- Interrogate our frameworks, and look for assumptions, values, and blind-spots
- Recognize and build from women's existing knowledge, resources, and authority
- Emotions and subjectivities
- Marital relations and motherhood
- Respect women's decisions and priorities



- Ambivalence, contradictions and trade-offs
- Negotiation of dualist categories: modernity vs. tradition and empowered vs. oppressed
- Uneven outcomes and intersectionality



Thank you

- Questions?

