



# International Experience and Theoretical Concepts of Improving the Wellbeing of Uzbekistan's Rural Women

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## ABSTRACT

This article provides the literature review of the international experience and theoretical concepts of improving the welfare of rural women taking into consideration objective and subjective indicators. It was revealed that the concept of rural women empowerment is an important element of public policy aimed at empowering citizens at the community, regional and national levels. The Government of Uzbekistan prioritized the implementation of the gender policy based on the principles of inclusion and equal access to natural, financial and technological resources. By adapting the international concept of the *Leaky bucket* the author developed the Gender Action and Community Development Plan for community as well as presented the ways of poverty reduction and increasing the wellbeing of rural women in Uzbekistan.

## Keywords:

rural women, gender equality, wellbeing, welfare, socio-economic peculiarities, gender empowerment, Uzbekistan

## Introduction

A number of studies are being carried out in the world to study ways and mechanisms of achieving gender equality (Gender Center of Syracuse University (SU) USA), ensuring equal opportunities for women and men in the social, economic and political development of countries (The School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) England, International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), USA). Foreign researchers give a special place to the role of women in the socio-economic development of society, who have the potential to influence economic growth, as well as the social development of society (Center of Gender Research Winnipeg University (WU) Canada). International Financial Institutes (FAO, World Bank, Asian Development Bank) conduct gender research among rural women in order to

actively involve them in socio-economic life within the framework of sectoral projects. Empowerment of rural women is a broader term that has been described from different perspectives at the international level. It is a global issue that has been the subject of research in recent decades. The socio-economic aspects of rural women's welfare, their involvement in sustainable community development, and achieving gender equality in remote areas has become one of the major research topics of many foreign scholars such as Chandra Mohanty, Gloria Wecker, Valentine Moghadam, Dennis Kandioti, Neil Kabir, etc.

who have been working in the field of rural women's empowerment.<sup>1</sup>

The use of the term "rural women's well-being, women's empowerment" has also attracted much attention from foreign researchers and governments. It is now widely recognized that gender equality and women's empowerment is a critical component of achieving socio-economic development outcomes, especially for developing nations. According to the existing literature, it has been analyzed that women empowerment is a complex and multidimensional concept. The different aspects of women empowerment derived from different definitions are: participation in production decisions and autonomy in production, asset ownership and access to and decisions about credit, control over the use of income, workload and time allocation, and education. It was also analyzed that access to these aspects and empowerment of rural women can lead to sustainable development in terms of improved livelihoods, leading to improved food security and well-being of their families and the entire community.

The concept of empowerment is widely used in contemporary theories and scientific approaches to address critical issues for the harmonious development of the entire society. The foundation of the concept of empowerment focuses on vulnerable groups such as rural women, children, people with disabilities and the disenfranchised. Due to the different conditions and level of socio-economic development of each state, the concept of empowerment can be utilized in different ways. The concept of empowerment is an important element of public policy aimed at empowering citizens. According to well-known sociologists E.B. Mezentseva, O.A. Voronina and others, the

problem of empowerment raises the following questions: who has decision-making authority, access to basic sources of livelihood, as well as to important sources of information and agencies? What are the characteristics of empowered people? Are they people who can control their lives, freely participate in any social movements, and decide the most important issues of social and economic life in the family, community, and at the highest level?<sup>2</sup> Feminist scholars do not agree on a universal and unified term of 'empowerment'. Empowerment is a practice in which marginalized groups in a community are empowered to participate in the process of participation and decision-making at the household and community levels. Hence, women's empowerment in the agricultural sector is a process in which women can participate in agricultural production and benefit equally with men, practice their leadership skills in the formal and informal sectors, and have equal access and opportunities to manage natural and financial resources. Promoting gender equity and fair treatment of women, especially rural women from developing countries that largely prioritize the agricultural sector, are also key to empowerment.

However, when using gender indicators developed by Western scientists, it was found that the indicators for measuring the well-being and involvement of rural women in the economy do not reflect the full and real picture of gender aspects and indicators of well-being. In addition, national traditions and mentality of developing countries such as India, Bangladesh, Nepal, Central and East Asia were not taken into account. In this regard, in the last two decades, scholars from third countries who were

<sup>1</sup> Kandiyoti, Deniz (September 1988). "Bargaining with Patriarchy". *Gender and Society*. 2 (3): 274–290. doi:10.1177/089124388002003004

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Kabeer, N. (2005). Gender equality and women's empowerment: A critical analysis of the third millennium development goal 1. *Gender & development*, 13(1), 13-24.

<sup>2</sup> Voronina, O. Fundamentals of Gender Theory and Methodology. // Theory and Methodology of Gender Studies. Course of lectures. Moscow, ICGI-MWSSEN-MFF, 2001, pp. 95-109.

Gardiner Fr. Gender Equality: Typology of Welfare States. Ensuring Gender Equality: Policies of Western European Countries. (ed. Fr. Gardiner) M., Idea-Press, 2000, 11-45 pp.

educated at leading Western universities such as the Gender Center of Syracuse University (SU) USA, the Center of Gender Research Winnipeg University (WU) Canada, the University of England, (The School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) England), International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), USA) suggest that the involvement of rural women in the local economies of developing countries should be considered taking into account the national specifics of each country.<sup>3</sup>

According to Professor Chandra Mohanty, any discussion of the intellectual and political construction of "Third World feminisms" must address two simultaneous projects: an internal critique of hegemonic "Western" feminisms and the formulation of autonomous feminist concerns and strategies that are geographically, historically, and culturally grounded. The first project is a project of deconstruction and dismantling; the second is a project of construction and creation. Although these projects seem contradictory, one working negatively and the other positively, if the two are not addressed simultaneously, Third World feminists risk being marginalized or ghettoized from both mainstream (right and left) and Western feminist discourses.<sup>4</sup>

Contemporary feminist scholars define empowerment as a multidimensional social process that helps people gain control over their own lives. Empowerment builds power in people for use in their own lives, in their communities, and in their society by acting on issues they deem important. By comparison, empowerment is "the processes of change by

which those who have been denied the ability to exercise choice gain that ability".<sup>5</sup>

The Gender Centers for Research in Western Universities developed the theoretical concept of the Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index, a theoretical approach to indicators of women's empowerment in agriculture for any country. The Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index is a new survey-based index designed to measure women's empowerment in the agricultural sector as well as their involvement in the agricultural sector in an attempt to identify ways to overcome the obstacles and constraints they will face. In order to track and measure women's empowerment, important indicators called "5 Domains of Empowerment" (5DE) have been introduced: "(1) agricultural production decisions, (2) access to and decision-making power over productive resources, (3) control over income utilization, (4) community leadership, and (5) time allocation".<sup>6</sup>

A number of studies have been conducted in India, Bangladesh and Nepal using the 5 Domains of Empowerment (5DE) methodology. In addition, the study also interviewed men and compared this with women's performance at the micro and macro levels. According to the findings, this approach provides an opportunity not only to identify gender gaps but also to develop new approaches for women's empowerment.

In the dissertation's opinion, such theoretical concepts of modern scientists open new opportunities for the study of rural women's well-being, taking into account the reflection of gender aspects in agriculture, the important role of women in the management of local

Struggles. Signs, 28(2), 499–535.  
<https://doi.org/10.1086/342914>

<sup>5</sup> Mandal, K. C. (2013, May). Concept and Types of Women Empowerment. In International Forum of Teaching & Studies (Vol. 9, No. 2). Reshi, I. A., & Sudha, T. (2022). Women Empowerment: A Literature Review. International Journal of Economic, Business, Accounting, Agriculture Management and Sharia Administration (IJEVAS), 2(6), 1353-1359 ctp.

<sup>6</sup> Alkire, S., Meinzen-Dick, R., Peterman, A., Quisumbing, A., Seymour, G., & Vaz, A. (2013). The women's empowerment in agriculture index. World development, 52, 71-91 ctp.

<sup>3</sup> Kandiyoti, Deniz (January 1990). "Women and rural development policies: the changing agenda". *Development and Change*. 21 (1): 5–22. [doi:10.1111/j.1467-7660.1990.tb00365.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-7660.1990.tb00365.x). Mohanty, C. T. (2003). "Under Western Eyes" Revisited: Feminist Solidarity through Anticapitalist Struggles. *Signs*, 28(2), 499–535. <https://doi.org/10.1086/342914>

<sup>4</sup> Mohanty, C. T. (2003). "Under Western Eyes" Revisited: Feminist Solidarity through Anticapitalist

communities and families, in reducing poverty, in the development of family and small businesses.<sup>7</sup>

Based on the practical participation of the author of the dissertation in socio-economic research within the framework of international projects funded by the World Bank, Asian Development Bank and other financial institutions, it was revealed that the role of rural women in Uzbekistan was more reflected on the basis of Western indicators and statistical data. Consequently, scholars from developing countries have sought to reflect the national specificity of gender indicators, as well as the peaceful and active involvement of rural women in socio-economic development and governance processes within families, communities, regions and the country. According to developing country scholars from India, Bangladesh, Ethiopia and other countries, women also play a significant role in sustainable economic development through their contributions to household and agricultural activities, often on par with men. At the same time, they believe that empowering women in agriculture is one of the most important aspects of empowering rural women. Women play a crucial role as farmers and businesswomen in small-scale agricultural production. At the same time, they manage household food as mothers. Women make up to half of the agricultural labor force in many developing countries; however, the nature and extent of the roles of male and female farmers vary from region to region, from culture to culture, even from crop to crop. In addition to women's active participation in agriculture, they are responsible for most household chores such as cooking, fetching water, collecting firewood, and caring for children because of the gendered division of labor. Women's empowerment has a direct

impact on agricultural productivity and household food security.

In the modern world, as President of Uzbekistan Mr. Sh.Mirziyayev emphasized at the summit of the SCO heads of state in Samarkand, emerging differences and problems at the global and national levels should be resolved on the basis of inclusive dialogue by "building up cultural-civilizational, interethnic, interreligious interaction".<sup>8</sup> The principle of inclusiveness is a central issue when we talk about women's empowerment in agriculture especially in developing countries where agriculture is the main source of income, as women are often excluded from decision-making processes at all levels. Consequently, questions such as - for whom, by whom and for what purpose should marginalized groups be empowered? - are still relevant to sociological and gender research at global and national levels.

The Human Development Index score fell sharply from 16% in 2010 to 11.7% in 2018 in Europe and Central Asia.<sup>9</sup> The 21st century is therefore marked by a focus on achieving not only equal rights for women and men, but also equal opportunities for vulnerable populations, including widows, disabled people, migrants, single mothers and fathers. According to the UN, 17% of children born in underdeveloped countries in 2000 will not reach their 20th birthday. While the identical figure in high-development countries will be only 1%.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, women and men from developed countries live 19 years longer than people from underdeveloped countries.<sup>11</sup> Although climate change and man-made disasters are contributing to deepening inequalities in the 21st century, the existence of institutional change and the political will of states to achieve gender equality and create equal opportunities for populations regardless of geographic

<sup>7</sup> См: Malapit, H. J., Pinkstaff, C., Sproule, K., Kovarik, C., Quisumbing, A. R., & Meinzen-Dick, R. S. (2017). The abbreviated women's empowerment in agriculture index (A-WEAI).

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.gazeta.uz/ru/2022/09/16/samarkand-initiative/>

<sup>9</sup> См: Chapter 1. Inequality in human development: Moving targets in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Human Development Report, 2019 Резюме, Доклад о Человеческом развитии

2019, За рамками уровня доходов и средних показателей сегодняшнего дня; неравенство в человеческом развитии в XXI веке.

<sup>10</sup> См: Overview, Inequalities in human development in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Human Development Report, 2019.

<sup>11</sup> См: Chapter 1. Inequality in human development: Moving targets in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Human Development Report, 2019

location remain important factors in addition to economic imbalances.

In this regard, the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are based on the concept of reducing inequality in all its dimensions, such as eradicating poverty and hunger (SDGs 1 and 2), creating basic conditions for a healthy life (SDG 3), quality education and creating conditions for lifelong learning (SDG 4), achieving gender equality and women's inclusion in socio-economic activities (SDG 5), access to clean water and sanitation, energy (SDGs 6 and 7), and the creation of decent jobs (SDG 8) especially for rural populations, including women. Foreign and national scientists believe that the creation of economically and socially sustainable local communities with active involvement of women, especially those living in rural areas, is one of the successful guarantees of poverty reduction and timely confrontation with new challenges of decreasing well-being, especially for people living in remote areas, including rural women.

While teaching the class of Professor Gord Cunningham, who has more than 30 years of experience in community socio-economic development and community-based microfinance in Canada and abroad, we had to adopt the resilience and necessity of the Leaky Bucket conceptual approach on the status transformation of different segments of the population, including women. Over time, this "Leaky Bucket" concept has been shown to be effective and has been successfully tested in developing countries, through the application of economic analysis of local community asset mobilization and the active participation of civil society.<sup>12</sup>

"The Leaky Bucket" is a popular educational conceptual approach that helps people at the grassroots level better understand their local economy. It allows them to identify and quantify the major flows of money into and out of their community. In turn, this process often leads to the identification of economic opportunities

that can help community members improve the well-being of their households and community. In the simple "leaky bucket" shown in **Figure 1**,

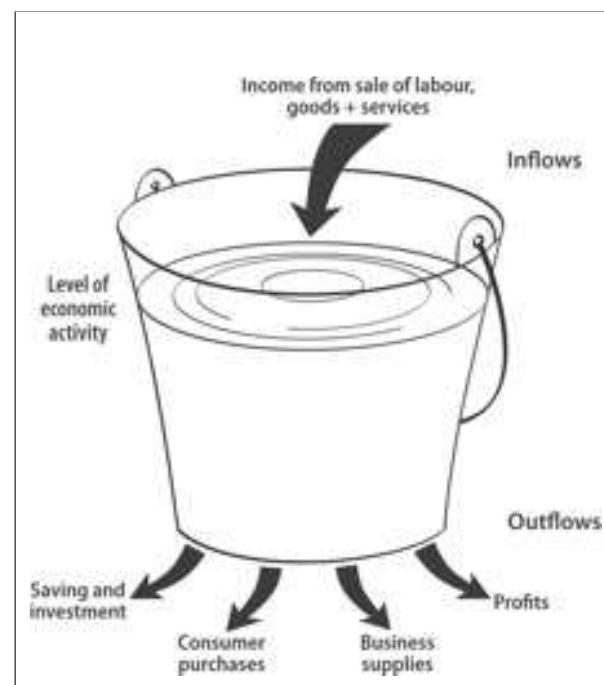


Figure 1. Leaky bucket

the arrow at the top represents money coming into the community from outside. This money usually includes income from the sale of goods and services or transfers from the government or family members. The arrows from the holes in the bottom of the bucket represent money leaving the community, usually in the form of spending on goods and services purchased from outside the community. The level of water reflects level of economic activity: the fuller the bucket, the more money circulates in the community and the healthier its economy. By identifying major inflows and outflows, the "holey bucket" can help guide decisions to:

- produce and sell new goods or services;
- expand existing activities, either by increasing production or by increasing the value of goods or services that community members already produce; and
- change spending patterns by revising expenditures or investing underutilized savings in more productive activities.

<sup>12</sup> Gord Cunningham, Community Economic Literacy and the "Leaky bucket" Coady International Institute Occasional Paper Series, No. 9 March 2011

- create planned community-driven activities. For example, an economic analysis of a local community can show whether the local economy has diversified or whether certain economic activities have intensified. Perhaps the most important aspect of the "leaky bucket" is its ability to demystify basic economic principles in an engaging way for people who might otherwise categorize themselves as "economically illiterate."

For example, this concept has been successfully applied in Ethiopia, where the economy is based largely on agriculture just as it is in Uzbekistan. After examining the major inflows and outflows, community leaders saw potential for the following initiatives:

1. Micro-credit scheme to support informal handicraft and forest products enterprises that link raw materials to finished products in the value chain

2. Tourism related activities to increase the flow of income into the community, e.g. construction of a marina for small boats, equipment and guidelines for sport fishing, and promotion of a major summer cultural festival "Pow Wow";

3. More local entertainment and shopping opportunities so that residents can shop locally and attract shoppers from surrounding communities.<sup>13</sup>

It is advisable to analyze the indicators for assessing the socio-economic well-being of women from the point of view of the quality of life. The concept of quality of life assumes a high quality of life, the components of which are the following indicators:

Objective indicators	Subjective indicators
Demographic indicators	Satisfaction with life
Health status	Reconciliation
Social protection system	Joy of well-being
Level of education	Happiness
Legal protection	Compromise
Access to health care	Consensus

Leisure conditions	time	Confidence in the future
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In the dissertation study, specific indicators were added to the criteria for creating objective conditions for economic well-being: socio-economic, legal, socio-cultural, socio-political, and goal-setting.

Adult education or life-long learning, where rural women are one of the target groups, is one of the important factors of sustainable socio-economic development of local communities. Based on foreign experience, rural community centers with modern libraries are one of the resources of education and economic progress. It is also possible to adapt and use the theoretical concept of "leaky bucket" taking into account socio-economic, cultural and national peculiarities of rural communities in Uzbekistan. On the other hand, the development and implementation of the concept of "leaky bucket" will allow taking into account subjective indicators of the quality of life of rural women, which are often not taken into account in sociological and economic research.

## Conclusion

Thus, the principle of inclusiveness and dialog of all major partners in the economic and social development of rural communities will be utilized at the local and regional levels, thus promoting the active involvement of rural women in improving the well-being of their families and mahallas. Increasing women leaders and their full participation in the economic and social life of their families and mahallas will help reduce poverty, promote democratic reforms and at the same time confront contemporary challenges such as climate change and reduction of natural resources.

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