A Tribute to Ester Boserup: utilizing interdisciplinarity to analyze global socio-economic change.

Irene Tinker

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Ester Boserup was a truly original scholar who challenged many prevailing economic development theories and became the guru of the women and international development movement. As such a towering scholar, she is more often quoted than read. Most people recall one or two ideas from her works and overlook her many other insights. She wove her examination of agriculture, technology, population, and women into a unified model that strengthened her analysis of the separate disciplines. Not only does her model provide insight into current trends, but her penetrating analyses have often anticipated contemporary debates. For example, her stance that food subsidies had a negative impact on agriculture has been a recurrent theme since she wrote about Denmark during World War II. Her observations that improvements in women's health and education were perhaps the best ways of achieving family planning were noted at the UN Population Conference in Bucharest in 1974 and anticipated resolutions made at the UN Population Conference in Cairo in 1994. Above all, Boserup demonstrated the interrelationship of technology change on the farm, in cities, or in factories with socially constructed roles for women and men, children and the elderly.

Up to the end she continued to elaborate on her model of development. Only two days before her death on September 24, 1999, at the age of 89, she had completed an essay for the Encyclopedia of Global Environment Change. Ivan Boserup, her younger son, wrote to her friends: "She was happy she had managed to write and publish My Professional Life and Publications 1929-1998, where she has stated in concise form what she found most important to stress in her own and in future research within the social sciences. 'More interdisciplinarity!' could have been her last words." The cover of this intellectual autobiography reflects this

mantra: it shows a circle with topics around its edges all connected by arrows: culture, environment, technology, population, occupation, family.

Before utilizing her own commentary to trace the evolution of her ideas and to discuss the impact of her work, I should like to place her writings into the context of her life and times, piecing together facts gleaned from our conversations over the years. In keeping with her reserved, even austere, personality, Ester summarizes her intellectual journey, noting the influences of her professional work and world events on her ideas, but she characteristically omits any personal reflections about combining work and family or about being a woman in a predominantly male profession. Nor does she mention her status as the savant and theorist for those of us studying woman's role in economic development. Indeed, I think Ester was bemused by all the attention and veneration she received from global feminists.

Formative influences

We all know that women's rights and autonomy have certainly not progressed in a linear fashion throughout history. Like the rise and fall of empires, women's roles have altered as the predominant cultures or beliefs have constructed women's lives to suit their purpose. The 1920s were a time of wrenching political changes on the European continent following World War I. Contending theories of socialism, communism, and democracy all nominally acknowledged women's equality with men. Universities were open to the talented as well as to the traditional elites; a good degree provided access to intellectual circles where women were more accepted as equals than they were among the middle and lower classes in what were still stratified societies.

Ester Borgesen was born in Copenhagen on May 18th, 1910, the only daughter of an engineer who had risen to a director of a major power company. Her father, son of a textile entrepreneur, died of diabetes when Ester was two; shortly thereafter an upheaval in the textile industry wiped out the family's investments. Further, the power company deprived her mother

of her widow's pension. Desperate, her mother moved into a flat with her mother and her brother and his wife; she learned hairdressing and embroidery to support herself and her daughter. Education was valued in her family; her great-grandfather had left farming for school teaching. Encouraged by her mother and aware of her limited prospects without a good degree, Ester studied diligently and entered the university when she was nineteen. No wonder that Ester championed education for women throughout her life.

During university, she married Mogens Boserup when both were twenty-one; the young couple lived on his allowance from his well-off family during their remaining university years. In 1935, Ester graduated with a degree in theoretical economics tempered by studies in sociology and agricultural policy. Her choice of a multi-disciplinary degree presages her intellectual path. She writes:

> From the very beginning of my university study of economics, the structural problems of human societies had imposed themselves on me by the contemporary world conditions: I began the University in the autumn of 1929, when the New York stock market crashed, and when I left we were still in the middle of the Great Depression of the thirties. Against this background, the prevailing theories of equilibrium and marginal utility seemed irrelevant and –like many of my fellow students – I looked for alternatives (1999:9).

This search for alternatives led to her membership in a socialist intellectual debating group and governed her choice of two divergent topics for the two research papers required for the degree. She wrote on the American Institutionalist School and on The Marxian Theory of Crises. Even at that young age her ideas were insightful; the paper on Marx was widely circulated and led to invitations to participate in scholarly meetings. The year following her graduation she published her first article that compared Keynes' theory of 'propensity to consume' with Marxist theory of underconsumption. Already her unconventional views were attracting attention.

Refusing to be constrained by the conventional wisdom of the day, Ester consistently looked for alternative approaches to existing problems. She worked for the Danish government from 1935 until 1947, an unsettled period that encompassed the depths of the depression, World War II with its German occupation, and the post-war recovery. As head of the planning office, she was involved with trade policies and observed first hand the effect of widespread government subsidies on Danish agriculture. When she and Mogens moved to Geneva in 1947 to work with the newly created UN Economic Commission of Europe (ECE), her work again focused on trade, much of which, as in Denmark, was in agricultural products In later years she wrote extensively on the issues of food aid and their disastrous impact of agriculture in Africa. Also while working for the ECE, Ester began to wonder whether the low rate of industrial growth in France might be related to its low population growth. Already the interrelationships between agriculture, population, trade, and industry were churning in her mind.

In 1957, she and Mogens agreed to work with Gunnar Myrdal, a senior researcher at the ECE, on a joint project assessing the future of India that was funded by the Twentieth Century Fund. Economic development assistance was at its zenith; western models of development were in ascendancy; and India was the experiment. Few people, Indian or western, questioned the validity of the prevailing theory; indeed, most of the economists in the Indian Planning Commission were western trained.

But Ester held to her critical gaze. Traveling about the country, Ester decided that what she had learned about agriculture in the west did not fit the Indian situation. She observed women working in the fields, noted the agricultural impact of various forms of tenure, and learned about the flexibility of agricultural labor. All this made her question many of the western-based assumptions about agricultural production, particularly the theories relating to surplus labor, population density, and migration. Such observations provoked an increasing skepticism of the entire project with Myrdal and a realization that the evaluations of the situation

in India held by Ester and her husband increasingly diverged from those held by Myrdal. So after completing the chapters required by their contract, Ester and Mogens declined to continue with this long term project and returned to Copenhagen. Myrdal finally published his massive and influential *Asian Drama* in 1965.

After returning from India, Ester did not hold a permanent job again, but rather preferred to combine consultancies with her research and writing. Mining the libraries in Denmark and at the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), she substantiated her Indian observations and sharpened her understanding of the interrelatedness of economics, agriculture, population, migration, technology, land use, and gender roles. Explaining these relationships and their implications for women and men became Ester's life work, and interdisciplinarity became her creed.

Family life During this period, Ester also became a mother. Her daughter, Birte, was born in 1937; her sons Anders, in 1940, and Ivan, in1944. When the children were young she was able to work parttime even though no such provisions were generally available. By the time Ester went to India, Birte had begun study of art and interior design in Switzerland, and soon married an Italian-Swiss lawyer who is now a judge on the provincial high court. Anders finished his schooling in Switzerland and then went out to India for a year before becoming a physicist; later in his life he returned to international work participating in peace research and the UN Disarmament Commission. He died in 1990 of a heart attack. Ivan had more international exposure: he was enrolled in a New Delhi school for two years and went to Senegal with his parents in1964-65; he is currently a classicist and research librarian with the Danish Royal Library. When the sons married, they made Copenhagen their home. Ester resided there until after her husband died, then moved in 1980 to Switzerland where she lived in the summer house she and Mogens had purchased when they worked in Geneva, and which was minutes away from her daughters home.

Ester seldom discussed her children and did not acknowledge any conflict between career and family. That comes as no surprise to me. I never carried pictures of my family; never talked about the problems of au pairs or maids with any but my closest friends. Working women simply managed; we were super-moms who believed we were equal despite the double burden. Ester was heavily invested in her career. She lived the life of a feminist, but as many young women today, she did not identify with the word. She considered her theoretical trilogy a single concept, uniting all aspects of her research into her model of economic development. I think she was genuinely moved, and not a little surprised, by her elevation as an icon of women and international development.

The Boserup model

The important intellectual contributions made by Ester Boserup provided a legitimacy to the growing women in international development movement. She presented an overarching theory that addressed major debates of the day regarding economic and social development and challenged prevailing paradigms. She produced three seminal books over a period of sixteen years that announced, expanded, and detailed her concept of economic development. Much more than the gurus of early economic theory who propounded the take-off approach, she rooted her ideas in multi-disciplinary literature and field research. In doing so, she observed the roles of women in the economies of subsistence and developing societies, roles well understood locally but at the time seldom documented except by anthropologists. For many of us, her genius was the way she integrated women into her fundamental theory of economic change.

Ester Boserup's broad view of development also meant her ideas about women became influential outside the often narrow field of economics. In similar ways, Amartya Sen today breathes respectability into much research on women. Both utilized a broad range of published and unpublished reports, articles, and books written largely by women, to document their

conclusions. At a time when much women's research is still regarded as marginal by the priests of academia, the importance of having these two towering scholars on our side is inestimable. The fact that both Boserup and Sen wrote chapters for my edited book *Persistent Inequalities* helps explain its continued use in universities around the world.

Boserup's model for economic development is based on extensive historical research. She argues that population densities compelled early societies to invent agricultural technologies in order to increase food production. New agricultural systems in turn required adaptations in the social structure, altering family work obligations and gender relationships. Changing agricultural methods affected the environment, as well. Increased food production, that resulted from improved technology, also fostered urbanization where social systems underwent even greater adjustment.

Agricultural change Ester Boserup first stated her development model in *Conditions of Agricultural Growth* that appeared in 1965. Rejecting the idea of static primitive societies that modernized only with exogenous technology, Boserup argues that such societies, under pressure from population growth, invent their own technologies to increase food production. More people means that existing land must be farmed more intensively as earlier systems, so long fallow rotation is replaced with short fallow periods. These changes required more labor input into farming, though no one worked very hard. Gradually the forest became grasslands which required the application of nutrients and the turning of the soil. Long fallow systems demanded little weeding; men cleared the land and women grew the food. Women began to weed the fields as shorter fallow periods pertained. Increasing population density led to more intensive agricultural systems using animal draft power and plows, and the substitution of common land for private ownership. Under this farming system, men had to spend more time growing food although women continued to do much of the labor. These historic stages are familiar to readers of Boserup's books, as are the implications for social structure; but Ester warns these changes are

not predictive of the future without study of technologies still in the pipeline (1981).

Less familiar are her theories of urbanization. Food surpluses allowed the expansion of town centers. But these surpluses might be the result of many producers rather than new technology; hence towns could grow prior to technological innovation. However, for towns to grow, they needed adequate transport for trade(1990:87). This gradualism which Boserup documented in her research into ancient, European, and American growth patterns became dislocated, she argued, with the abrupt introduction of modern technology into areas lacking requisite infrastructure or cultural receptivity. For these reasons, the introduction of modern farming techniques, such as the Green Revolution, has had very different impacts in Asia and Africa. With its limited infrastructure and sparse population, Africa benefitted little from the new technologies in comparison to Asia which had adequate transport, trained extension workers, and rural amenities. Continued low agricultural productivity in Africa led many governments to seek, and development agencies to provide, imported food for urban areas. These staples were sold at subsidized prices, thus further reducing incentives for food production. "The assumption of inelasticity of food production...made large-scale transfer of food from industrialized to developing countries look like a desirable solution to the agricultural problems of both the developing and developed countries" (1990:281). Farmers leave the land and crowd into rapidly expanding urban agglomerations where misery reigns.

Population increase Boserup's theories about population growth also challenged contemporary wisdom. When she published *Population and Technological Change* in 1981 she reiterated the theory first presented in *Conditions of Agricultural Growth*: with the new book she sought to broaden and deepen the theory, discussing the causes as well as the effects of population increase.

In the 1960s, the theories of Thomas Malthus dominated population policy: because people were increasing geometrically while food was increasing arithmetically, land for

cultivation would soon be exhausted and starvation, wars, or pestilence would ensue. Boserup argued that Malthus saw the world as static; she believed that population densities would result in new technologies that would increase food production on lands currently in production. Dense populations were also necessary if roads, schools, and health clinics were to be provided in remote rural areas. Population growth was therefore necessary for economic development.

In the introduction to Boserup's collected essays, T. Paul Schultz remarks that Boserup in effect stood Malthus on his head. "The historical record remains sufficiently varied and uncertain, so that neither the model of Malthus nor that of Boserup explains adequately all the evidence. But the last two decades have moved the mainstream interpretation of this process in the direction proposed by Boserup" (1990:2).

Boserup expounded the importance of population growth to economic development, but she also argued that women's ability to determine "when and how often to bear children" is a decisive element in women's efficient participation in the development process (1975:26). To accomplish this, women needed access to education and health services. Active at the first UN World Population Conference in Bucharest in 1974, her views were incorporated in a consensus resolution declaring that an improvement in women's status and educational opportunities would promote women's health as well as a reduction of birth rates. Such an approach was as important "regardless of whether the over-all situation is one of strong pressure of population on resources or an insufficient population base for development (1975:26) Further, she noted how traditional methods of spacing were often discarded during economic change leading to higher fertility per woman and often increased maternal and infant morbidity and mortality ("Population, the status of women, and rural development" 1990:161-174). The importance of women's health and education to population programs was reiterated and expanded in 1994 at the Cairo UN Conference for Population and Development by a global coalition of women's organizations.

At the 1984 UN population conference in Mexico City, the U.S. population policy, influenced by Christian conservatives, did a flip-flop away from strong support for funding international family planning programs. Intellectually, US policy drew on the writings of Julian Simon and his uncritical support of technology as *the* answer to population pressures. Boserup was sometimes incorrectly associated with his views. To clarify the distinction, she emphasized that her model distinguished between endogamous technology, that was a creative way to increase food productions, and exogamous technology, that is too often introduced to cultures not yet motivated to accept the changing systems. Inappropriate or abrupt technology often has a destabilizing impact on culture and economics. Further when modern technologies are transferred wholesale to low income countries, as happens with globalization, international trade is affected. High wage countries maintain or increase subsidies for crops and products to maintain competitiveness with lower income countries despite calls for free trade; many firms move to low wage countries "with the result that structural unemployment has become a serious problem in many high wage countries" (1999:42). These trends are at the heart of the controversies at the World Trade Organization.

A theoretical base for women in international development

Ester Boserup's book on *Woman's Role in Economic Development* was first published in 1970, five years after her *The Conditions of Agricultural Growth: The economics of agrarian change under population pressure.* When the latter book was in press, she spent a year in Senegal where Mogens was directing the UN Institute for Economic Development and Planning. Traveling widely in Africa on various UN contracts, Ester explored linkages between industry and agriculture and investigated the predominantly male migration to cities. Ester wrote that she was "intrigued by this unexpected (for me) pattern" where women grew the food and men sent home part of their earnings, and determined to study women's roles in economic development. "Knowing that this was a controversial issue, I wanted it to be a solid study, based on official

statistics." Obtaining a research grant from Denmark, she returned to Asia as Africa to interview local officials and collect case studies that more accurately reflected women's work than the usual labor statistics. She delighted in commenting that her book contained 12 figures and 64 tables, and cited 258 sources (1999:24).

Throughout her book, Boserup is interested in occupational distribution; her first sentence states: "A main characteristic of economic development is the progress towards an increasingly intricate pattern of labour specialization" (1970:15). She further emphasizes that the division of labor within the family is assigned by age and sex, and this distribution varies across regions and cultures. Criticizing generalizations made by Margaret Mead that men are the providers of food while women prepare it, she distinguishes between male and female farming systems.

Women farmers Only the first third of her book is an examination of women's roles in these various farming systems, though this is the section most often quoted as it makes women's subsistence and farm work visible. Women's economic worth is related to their status: bride price is paid where women work in the fields; a dowry is offered to convince the groom to accept a non-working wife. Where women farm and men can purchase their labor and where land use rights can be expanded, polygamy continues. Cultural practices appear to trump religion in this regard for the most of the countries with high levels of polygamous households are in West Africa.[1] In Muslim areas where dowry is the rule, the incidence of polygamy is largely confined to the wealthy. In these areas of male farming, upper caste/status women are in seclusion but women from the lower classes frequently work as casual laborers, an occupation that emphasizes the economic costs of female seclusion.

[1] About half of all married women live in polygamous marriages in Senegal, Togo, and Guinea; over 40% in Liberia, Nigeria, and Cameroon; one-third in Ghana, Niger, and Uganda. Table in Philippe Antoine and Jeanne Nanitelamio, 1996. "Can polygyny be avoided?" in Kathleen Sheldon, ed., *Courtyards, Markets, and City Streets: Urban Women in Africa.* I was in Cameroon just prior to the Pope's visit in 1985; many Catholic men were debating the merits of becoming monogamous by separating from the extra wives in order to receive the Pope's blessing.

Boserup devotes an entire chapter to describing the loss of women's status under European colonialism. Two of her points stand out: first, the promotion of land ownership deprived women of use rights in areas of Africa and South East Asia, and second, the belief that men were superior farmers encouraged the introduction of technology and cash crops to men, especially in Africa, thus leaving women to continue using traditional low yield methods for growing subsistence crops. Both actions continue to have current repercussions. Land rights and ownership have become highly contested, especially in Africa where bride price custom continues. In countries such as Rwanda or Uganda, where wars and/or HIV/AIDS have left grandmothers as the primary providers for their extended families, women's right to control her own farm land is now being recognized[2]. One the second point, insufficient attention to subsistence food production in Africa is a primary cause for the decline in per capita food availability throughout the continent.

Women in towns Boserup distinguishes between female and male towns as she distinguished farming systems. Female towns are centered on markets where women dominate the trade. Male towns are of two types: they may have a surplus of men in the population or they may be towns where women are in seclusion and therefore unseen. A semi-male town is one where women dominate the traditional markets while the modern sector is exclusively the domain of men. Further, most towns include migrants of ethnicities whose cultures diverge regarding women's occupations.

Market towns trade both agricultural and non-agricultural commodities. Because historically women produced many of the household products they needed, increased opportunities for trade encourages specialization. Products may originate in rural areas but trading is done in towns. Women and men also offered their tailoring and food at markets.

[2]See my chapter in Irene Tinker & Gale Summerfield, eds. *Women's Rights to House and Land: China, Laos, Vietnam*. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1999.

Boserup called this activity the “bazaar and service sector” which was a more focused concept than the more widely used residual category “informal sector.” Her category is more accurate, for when the International Labour Organization (ILO) studies looked at the informal sector they were searching for small enterprises that hired workers. This classification effectively screens out most women or family run microenterprises, such as street food vending, or home-based work, or urban agriculture.[3] Boserup notes that many women prefer such work to factory jobs because it more easily mesh with household responsibilities. This is also true of other economic activities that women can conduct from home.[4]

The impact of higher education on women’s occupations reveals continued discrimination by sex. Ester attributes the “polarization and hierarchization” of men’s and women’s work roles to the maldistribution of technology between them. But she also notes how the age-sex-race-class hierarchies play out differently on different groups of women and often reward some occupations while increasing discrimination against women in other (1970:140).

Broadening the audience As soon as *Woman’s Role* was published, the Danish Broadcasting Company presented Boserup with a prize that entailed popularizing her book through six radio broadcasts. As a result, she was included on the Danish delegation to the UN. In 1972 she began an eight year membership in the UN’s Committee of Development Planning. This in turn led to her appointment as rapporteur to the first UN experts meeting that addressed the issue of women in international economic development.

This experts meeting marked the first attempt by the of the Social Development Division

[3] See, for example, my *Street Foods: Urban Food and Employment in Developing Countries*, 1997, Oxford University Press; and Lisa Prugl and Irene Tinker, 1997, "Microentrepreneurs and Homeworkers: Convergent Categories", *World Development*, 25/9:1471-1482.

[4] For a current reading of women’s urban occupations see my “Feeding megacities: a worldwide viewpoint,” *The Urban Age*, World Bank, winter 1998:4-7; or: "Beyond Economics: Sheltering the Whole Woman," in *Engendering Wealth and Well-Being*, Rae Blumberg, Cathy Rakowski, Irene Tinker, & Michael Monteon, eds. Boulder, CO: Westview, 1995. pp. 261-283.

of the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs to focus on the roles of women in development or for the co-sponsor, UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), to address economic development issues as framed by the documents proclaiming the First Development Decade 1960-70.[5] The original topic of the 1972 consultation was to be on welfare and status of women, according to Gloria Scott, then head of planning of the Social Development Division. She argued that "welfare and status were empty concepts without development" and persuaded her former professor, Sir Arthur Lewis, to chair a group of noted economists to address this issue. "Constant vigilance," she wrote, "was needed to retain the development focus which this meeting anchored in discussions about women."[6]

Development as a women's issue Ester Boserup's report of this Experts Meeting provided the UN with documentation that development was indeed a women's issue. Women's issues had been assigned to the Commission on the Status of Women (CWS) in 1946, a year after the UN Charter was ratified. Leaders of international women's organizations lobbied for their own space at the UN where women's issues could be raised. From its formation, CSW had focused primarily on women's civil and political rights, including labor rights, and on educating women.[7] During the Cold War era, the communist countries argued in the Commission on

[5]Issues related to women's rights to work and receive equal pay had been debated in the Commission on the Status of Women as early as 1953. Reflecting the long-standing debate between labor women who promoted protective legislation for women, and the women's movement with its emphasis on equal rights , this dichotomy reappeared in the US debate over the Equal Rights Amendment. See Women in Washington: Advocates for Public Policy, I. Tinker, ed. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications, 1983.

[6] Gloria Scott, forthcoming. "Breaking new ground," in Arvonne Fraser & Irene Tinker eds., *Women Affecting International Development: a personal and policy memoir*. NY: Feminist Press

[7] Labor issues concerning women, as articulated in the International Labour Organization, generally focused on home work, or sweat shops. The antipathy of labor unions to this type of work was challenged by economic development programs which promoted microenterprise in the home. See "Microentrepreneurs and Homeworkers: Convergent Categories", Irene Tinker and Elizabeth Prugl, World Development, 25/9:1471-1482, Sep 1997. For a superb history of

Human Rights that economic rights such as housing, food, and employment were of equal importance with political rights, but this view was not reflected in the CSW.[8] Developing country membership increased in the UN as most colonies became independent; these countries lobbied for more attention to development issues causing the decade 1960-1970 to be declared the First Development Decade. Only during the Second Development Decade 1970-80, however, was the link made between women and development as a result of the recommendations of the Experts Meeting.

Also in 1972, the General Assembly finally passed a resolution declaring 1975 International Women's Year (IWY) after many years of requests from the CSW. During the debate, the themes of the year were articulated as equality, peace, and development: equality for the west, peace for the east, and development for the global south. At first, IWY was designated simply as a year, but the reinvigorated women's movement, especially in the United States, influenced their governments to support a World Conference for IWY which subsequently took place in Mexico City in June 1975. [9]

Connecting with the women's movement Women globally were observing governmental policies that discriminated against women. Despite the fact that most newly independent countries gave women equal citizenship rights in their constitutions, prevailing

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the homework debate and hope government positions projected their assumptions about women's roles see Elizabeth Prugl, 1999. *The Global Construction of Gender: Home-Based Work in the Political Economy of the 20th Century.* NY: Columbia U. Press.

[8] The divergent views about what constitutes a human right continues with the recent debate over Asian values. When the UN Convention on Human Rights in 1993 proclaimed that women's rights are human rights, the concept of rights was expanded to include health, education, and

[9] A useful history of the Commission on the Status of Women and the first three UN Conferences on Women may be found in Anne Winslow, ed., 1995. *Women, Politics, and the United Nations.* Westport CN: Greenwood. Also see Irene Tinker & Jane Jaquette, 1987, "UN Decade for Women: Its Impact and Legacy", *World Development*, 15/3.

customs allowed male dominance. In the US, the women's movement grew in strength and demanded equal wages, equal educational opportunities particularly to professional schools, access to credit and mortgages, and so on. Women in newly independent countries wondered what happened to the nationalist rhetoric that promised equality for women and men. Deterioration rather than improvement of the status of women was observed in many countries. All of these trends were noted in Boserup's trenchant observations that utilized many studies by anthropologists and policy makers to substantiate her conclusions.

During this tumultuous decade, women organized in many countries to change development programming and social policies of their governments. The evident scholarship of *Woman's Role* and author's impressive credentials as a mainstream economist provided the burgeoning community of women in international development proponents with a convincingly academic reference. Once the awareness of Boserup's writings became widespread, her theories became the scholarly foundation of the women in international development.[10]

As the second wave of the women's movement expanded around the world, the issue of women's roles in economic development programming gained momentum. Inga Thorsson had persuaded the Swedish Parliament to mandate government support for women in its foreign assistance programs as early as 1964. In the US Congress, a group of us feminists lobbied successfully for the inclusion of a paragraph in the U.S. Foreign Assistance Act of 1973 that directed administrators to integrate women into the new poverty-focused programs.[11] This paragraph was subsequently included in resolutions for many UN agencies as well as in the

[10] The book was published in limited numbers and was out of print for many years though its continuing demand has resulted in translations into Swedish (1971), Danish (1974), Italian (1982), German (1982), French (1983), Indonesian (1983), and Spanish (1993), the latter containing a new introduction by Boserup.

[11] For the story of how this amendment was written and passed, and for an understanding of the euphoria of the US women's movement in the 1970s, see my edited volume *Women in Washington: Advocates for Public Policy*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications, 1983.

General Assembly, as these bodies began to anticipate the upcoming IWY. The activists and administrators who promoted greater visibility for the issues of women and international development found in Ester Boserup's book the statistics and trends that gave credence to their demands for a policy shift.[12]

Funds were short for the preparation of the 1975 UN World Conference of International Women's year. The 1974 population conference had held a series of preparatory meetings including one that focused on women and population. Reports and papers prepared for that conference added to the sparse literature that documented women role in economic development. Recognizing the importance of her contributions to the field, the UNDP asked Boserup to summarize her major viewpoints in a short pamphlet for the IWY conference; with assistance from Christina Liljencrantz, she wrote *Integration of women in development: why when, how*. Distributed in Mexico City, this pamphlet provided delegates to the IWY Conference with information to strength the conference document, the Plan of Action, regarding women and development.

A second activity that helped publicize both the topic and Ester's major contributions was the Seminar on Women in Development held in Mexico City just prior to the IWY Conference. Sponsored by the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS), and under my leadership, over a hundred women and men from around the world gathered to analyze development issues and propose recommendations to the UN.[13] These materials were also

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[12]See Irene Tinker, 1990, "The Making of the Field: Advocates, Practitioners, and Scholars." in I. Tinker, ed., *Persistent Inequalities: Women and World Development*. NY: Oxford University Press.

[13] Margaret Mead, then president of AAAS, gave generously of her support for my efforts as director of the office of international programs. Research papers and an annotated bibliography, prepared for the symposium, added to the growing studies in the field. Proceedings and papers were edited by I. Tinker and M. Bo Bramsen and published as *Women and World Development*, under the auspices of the AAAS by the Overseas Development Council: Washington DC, 1976. *Women and World Development: An annotated bibliography* is a companion volume, edited by

distributed at the governmental conference.

Ester Boserup participated in the symposium; it was the first time we met. Subsequently we represented our respective governments on the newly created Board of the UN International Instituted for the Research and Training for Women (INSTRAW) and met as several conferences and UN Experts Meetings. Never reluctant to express her own point of view, Ester always amazed her audience with her breadth of scholarship and historical knowledge.

Ester Boserup's importance for activists, scholars, and practitioners

Rereading *Woman's Role in Economic Development* for this essay, I am once again struck by the range of topics discussed and the identification of many research areas not yet fully explored. At first, many of us utilized the Boserup model to argue for policy changes in international agricultural development programs. In the 1970s, most development assistance was focused on increasing food production in rural areas and reducing rural poverty.

For years, urban areas were perceived as less needy but planners. As rapid migration produced squatter settlements filled with families struggling to provide a livelihood for their children, more attention was given to housing and to available employment in the informal sector. As noted above, the ILO studies focused on enterprises large enough to provide employment; for some time the microenterprises operated by a woman or her family were ignored or discounted. Today, Boserup's emphasis on the critical role that women's income from the bazaar and service sector plays in urban survival is now broadly recognized. Home based work in both rural and urban areas continues to provide millions of women with income; women at home are now being organized in both developed and developing countries for the purposes of more efficient enterprises, better wages, and health and retirement benefits.[14]

Mayra Buvinic.

[14] See Prugl & Tinker, op. cit; my "Women and power: the symbiosis of in and out," paper

Multidiscipilarity Scholarship has become so fragmented today; the flood of information on the internet tends if anything to continue this process despite hopes that easy access to data might help bridge the chasms among disciplines. Ester Boserup embodied the interdisciplinary approach; she also championed the use of scholarship to influence policy. Nonetheless, she warns that using monetary proxies for non-monetized transactions lead to false conclusions, although many publications, such as the *Human Development Report*, promote this approach in order to convince policy makers about the importance of social trends.

Often, she argues, government policy conflicts with economic change and uses the examples of powerful agricultural lobbies that demand subsidies when "the government should promote structural reform" (1999:29). Excess food production in high income countries was exported to support subsidized food in urban areas in developing countries; while perceived as humanitarian, this policy overlooked the impact on food production and employment in rural areas. Subsequent reduction of world food surplus through policies that limited production further exacerbated the food situation around the world. Arguing for more attention to increased production in rural areas, she argues that "As long as economic infrastructure is more, it is not possible to modernize agriculture" (1990:280).

Boserup criticizes formal economic models, widely used for development planning, as static. Analyses of land, labor, and capital may be sufficient for short term plans, but

> long-term development analysis must take account of structural change, i.e.,*change of the capacities themselves.*, by land improvements or deterioration, population change b natural change or migrations, major changes in income distribution and political systems, etc. Moreover, long-term analysis must take into account the changes in those structures which economists usually leave to be studies by other scientific disciplines, for instance

> national cultures... Rapid technological change created conflicts with national culture through its radical influence on the way of life: Cultural attitudes and behavior, which may have been rational before, are no more so.... The importance of these problems for economic development is overlooked by economists, when they make the assumption that rational behavior is the rule whatever the circumstances. (1999:58-9; 60).

Women and change The ebb and flow that result from economic changes on the relative status of women and men as analyzed through age-sex-class-race hierarchies is a central theme of the Boserup model. She examines the conflicts among generations of women her new introduction to the 1983 Spanish edition of *Woman's Role in Economic Development*. "Since the first edition of this book appeared in 1970," she recounts how such changes as greater "access to jobs in large scale industries and modern-type services, the rapid spread of female education, and the access to health services and family planning" have altered their life experiences. Some older women have supported patriarchal Islamic governments because they "have more to lose than to gain by improvements in the position of young women ."

And in her last letter to me, in July 1999, she reflected on contemporary trends with concern. "I think that today the greatest threat to women comes from the US neoliberal campaign, which if it succeeds in privatizing schools, universities, child institutions, and culture, will also 'reprivatize women in their homes.' I wonder how long the European governments can keep up their resistance against the American pressure."

I prefer to recall her words from a July 1996 letter written in response to complaints about the backlash against the women's movement globally. "I had never dreamt that there would be so (many) big changes in the position of both women and poor countries in my lifetime, and find it inevitable that such large changes will cause a lot of reaction and both short and long run counter movements. So don't become too gloomy a pessimist."

Conclusion For many women active in influencing policy both inside and outside

governments and international agencies, the existence of a scholarly base from which to argue cannot be overestimated. For example, Vina Mazumdar, who coordinated the 1979 India Commission on the Status of Women report, recalled learning of the Boserup book only after the report was in press. Reading that book made her feel more confident of the conclusions and recommendations found in the report . Vina's rush of discovery and identification that came from reading *Woman's Roles in Economic Development* is an experience similar to my own. Clearly Ester Boserup's book legitimized and documented the many tentative ideas growing in the minds of many women as a result of observing the changes affecting women in the developing countries. Whatever your views of specific findings or analyses, the entire community of scholars, activists, and practitioners has benefitted from the Boserup model.

Books by Ester Boserup:

The Conditions of Agricultural Growth: The economics of agrarian change under population pressure. 1965. London: George Allen and Unwin.

Woman's Role in Economic Development. 1970. London: George Allen and Unwin.

Population and Technological Change: A study of long-term trends. 1981. Chicago: U. of Chicago Press.

Economic and Demographic Relationships in Development: Essays selected and introduced by T. Paul Schultz. 1990. Baltimore MD: Johns Hopkins Press.

My Professional Life and Publications 1929-1998. 1999. Copenhagen: Museum Tuscularnum Press.

With Christina Liljencrantz, *Integration of women in development: why when, how.* 1975. NY UNDP . 42 pages

Endnotes:

**I should like to thank Ivan Boserup for reading the manuscript and suggesting clarifications to my notes from talking with Ester. Other unpublished materials used were from our correspondence.

1. About half of all married women live in polygamous marriages in Senegal, Togo, and Guinea; over 40% in Liberia, Nigeria, and Cameroon; one-third in Ghana, Niger, and Uganda. Table in Philippe Antoine and Jeanne Nanitelamio, 1996. "Can polygyny be avoided?" in Kathleen Sheldon, ed., *Courtyards, Markets, and City Streets: Urban Women in Africa.* I was in Cameroon just prior to the Pope's visit in 1985; many Catholic men were debating the merits of becoming monogamous by separating from the extra wives in order to receive the Pope's blessing.

2. See my chapter in Irene Tinker & Gale Summerfield, eds. *Women's Rights to House and Land: China, Laos, Vietnam*. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1999.

3. See, for example, my *Street Foods: Urban Food and Employment in Developing Countries,* 1997, Oxford University Press.

4. For a current reading of women's urban occupations see my "Feeding megacities: a worldwide viewpoint," *The Urban Age,* World Bank, winter 1998:4-7; or: "Beyond Economics: Sheltering the Whole Woman," in *Engendering Wealth and Well-Being,* Rae Blumberg, Cathy Rakowski, Irene Tinker, & Michael Monteon, eds. Boulder, CO: Westview, 1995. pp. 261-283.

5. Issues related to women's rights to work and receive equal pay had been debated in the Commission on the Status of Women as early as 1953. Reflecting the long-standing debate between labor women who promoted protective legislation for women, and the women's movement with its emphasis on equal rights , this dichotomy reappeared in the US debate over the Equal Rights Amendment. See Women in Washington: Advocates for Public Policy, I. Tinker, ed. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications, 1983.

6. Gloria Scott, forthcoming. "Breaking new ground," in Arvonne Fraser & Irene Tinker eds., *Women Affecting International Development: a personal and policy memoir*. NY: Feminist Press.

7. Labor issues concerning women, as articulated in the International Labour Organization, generally focused on home work, or sweat shops. The antipathy of labor unions to this type of work was challenged by economic development programs which promoted microenterprise in the home. See "Microentrepreneurs and Homeworkers: Convergent Categories", Elizabeth Prugl and Irene Tinker, World Development, 25/9:1471-1482, Sep 1997. For a superb history of the homework debate and hope government positions projected their assumptions about women's roles see Elizabeth Prugl, 1999. *The Global Construction of Gender: Home-Based Work in the Political Economy of the 20th Century.* NY: Columbia U. Press.

8. The divergent views about what constitutes human rights continues with the recent debate over Asian values. The rights debate has been expanded both at the UN World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna in 1993, which proclaimed that women's rights are human rights, and at the Third World Conference on Population and Development in Cairo in 1994, the concept reproductive rights accepted.

9. A useful history of the Commission on the Status of Women and the first three UN Conferences on Women may be found in Anne Winslow, ed., 1995. *Women, Politics, and the United Nations.* Westport CN: Greenwood. Also see Irene Tinker & Jane Jaquette, 1987, "UN Decade for Women: Its Impact and Legacy", *World Development*, 15/3.

10. The book was published in limited numbers and was out of print for many years though its continuing demand has resulted in translations into Swedish (1971), Danish (1974), Italian (1982), German (1982), French (1983), Indonesian (1983), and Spanish (1993), the latter containing a new introduction by Boserup.

11. For the story of how this amendment was written and passed, and for an understanding of the euphoria of the US women's movement in the 1970s, see my edited volume *Women in Washington: Advocates for Public Policy*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications, 1983.

12. See Irene Tinker, 1990, "The Making of the Field: Advocates, Practitioners, and Scholars." in I. Tinker, ed., *Persistent Inequalities: Women and World Development*. NY: Oxford University Press.

13. Margaret Mead, then president of AAAS, gave generously of her support for my efforts as director of the office of international programs. Research papers and an annotated bibliography, prepared for the symposium, added to the growing studies in the field. Proceedings and papers were edited by I. Tinker and M. Bo Bramsen and published as *Women and World Development*, under the auspices of the AAAS by the Overseas Development Council: Washington DC, 1976. *Women and World Development: An annotated bibliography* is a companion volume, edited by Mayra Buvinic.

14. See Prugl, op. cit.; Prugl & Tinker, op. cit; my "Women and power: the symbiosis of in and out," paper presented at a conference on *Gender in International Relations* at the University of Southern California, 2-4 February 2001.